

West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting on 16 June 2023

Questions received from the public with the Metro Mayor's responses:

1. Question 1 received from Steve Reade

Mayor Norris, you will undoubtedly be aware of the level of upset amongst residents following your declaration that you were going to give all residents of the West of England Combined Authority region a birthday present of 1 month's free bus travel for the month in which they were born.

As you know I have for a long time been calling on the Authority and the bus companies to do something to increase patronage on the bus service. But at no time did I think it would involve you spending 8 million pounds of the BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) grant.

Can you tell me under what authority you can unilaterally spend, or at least ring fence this amount of money? I could find no reference to a decision being taken by officers.

BSIP is supposed to be for new or innovative services. You have specifically declared that it can not be used to prop up existing services, which is exactly what this will do (in part).

The residents who rely on the 84 and 85 to name but 2 would have rather a proportion of the money could have gone on free tickets for the use of the 84 and 85 so making them viable.

The Metro Mayor's response:

As Mayor when I talk to people right across our area and indeed the country, I detect real excitement and enthusiasm about the plan for Birthday Buses. It is backed by all the major bus companies and Bus Users UK, who called it "an absolutely fantastic initiative." It is only locally there appears to be whipped up politicised carping about it. I believe this is bad for our region and urge people to get behind a scheme that would help people during this frightening cost of living crisis and actually try to drive up passenger numbers rather than offer sticking plaster solutions.

Decisions of the officers of the West of England Combined Authority are in accordance with the governance arrangements agreed by the West of England Combined Authority Committee on 1 July 2022. At the meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Committee on Wednesday 18 January 2023 the delegation was approved unanimously.

The BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) programme is all about new and innovative ways of promoting passenger growth. As the first such scheme of this type ever, the Department for Transport has shown particular interest in our exciting Birthday Bus scheme. At the time of writing we await their formal sign off.

The BSIP budget is designed to grow the bus network and get more people using it. Our BSIP has the aim of growing passenger numbers by 24% by 2030. However the budget is very time limited (to March 2025) so focus has to be on interventions that are self-sustaining and encourage behaviour change in the long term. Interventions that require ongoing subsidies are less effective as the public benefits stop as soon as the BSIP budget ends.

The logic behind the birthday fares offer is that:

- those people using the buses pre-pandemic have largely returned, however they are taking fewer trips than before;
- if we are going to grow the number of bus passengers we need to appeal to those who currently do not use the buses;
- in many cases people do not use the bus because using the car has become the default type of transport – even where there is a suitable public transport option;
- of those who use the bus there is a high level of satisfaction and the long term trend on passenger growth (pre-covid) was upward (unlike most of England);
- there is also significant scope for further growth given that only 9% of commutes are by public transport (and 66% of commutes are by car).

Therefore those people who take up the offer of free travel for a month may discover that it is quicker and easier than they thought and decide to switch mode for some of their trips. I genuinely believe the case that if you try it you might like it or even love it!

Research has shown that free public transport offers can result in both immediate demand growth and longer term behaviour change.

The introduction of free travel unsurprisingly results in increased public transport usage, for example Tallin (14% increase). Free transport for state employees in Hesse Germany led to a 12% increase in public transport use where the main beneficiaries were poorer, women and older employees. More important were the wider changes in attitude to both public transport (improved) and car use (negative).

Randomised experiments conducted in Kyoto and Copenhagen where drivers were given free public transport travel for a month both showed significant increase in public transport use during the experiment and importantly continued (albeit declining) bus /public transport use after the experiment and longer term improved attitudes to bus use. “The results suggest that a temporary structural change, may be an important tool for converting car travel demand to public-transport travel demand”.

Limited-period fare free public transport has been used successfully in the Swedish city of Gothenburg (roughly the same population as Bristol) to boost the public transport use. In 2019, the regional transport agency handed out 30,000 free 2-week passes valid for travel on buses and trams. This was part of a long-running outreach campaign to encourage residents to use transport services and to double the number of journeys made by public transport by 2025. They have had 30 such ‘test-ride’ campaigns since 2010 and estimates that around 20% of those receiving the free tickets, or 100,000 residents, have become regular users of public transport as a result.

Potential Impacts

The outcomes we will be looking at for this scheme are

- Overall use of the free birthday tickets
- Increased bus use during the (12 month) offer
- Increased bus use once the offer has ended (behaviour change)
- Changes in attitudes to bus use

Clearly any assessment of the likely impact will be speculative but just to provide a sense of scale.

- There are currently approx. 50m bus trips pa in the region.
- If this scheme achieves a 1% increase in bus use that would mean an additional 500k bus trips pa.
- A 1% outcome is not unreasonable given the research above (10% use the scheme of which 10% continue using buses)
- 500k additional bus trips pa generates over £1m pa of fare income into the bus industry plus the additional benefits from reduced congestion and carbon reduction.
- Our agreement with First Bus is that the benefits of any growth in passenger numbers will be shared between First Bus and the Combined Authority/North Somerset Council with the public sector getting 75% of any increased revenue.

Other important benefits – data

The data collected from the birthday travel tickets will be a vital resource. These users, who have taken the trouble to access the tickets, will be the most engaged existing and potential users. In particular the new bus users will be the cohort nearest to making the transition to bus. Understanding their travel patterns and needs will be vital for us and bus companies for planning future services and investments and tailoring future interventions to get the most growth in bus use.

Other important benefits – time

The fact that this scheme is spread over 12 months ensures that:

- the risk of overcrowding is minimised
- it allows us to monitor data throughout a calendar year, and
- it allows us to refine and develop the marketing and publicity for the scheme – avoiding one big bang.

I remain sceptical that you wanted to have a directly elected regional mayor in post to come up with new and potentially popular ideas like this. I really hope that Birthday Buses will act as a catalyst for bus travel in the West of England to boost the number of passengers and, with a whole month of free travel, encourage a long-term shift in travel behaviour. We really need more people using buses to help reach our net zero targets and keep ourselves, and the planet, breathing. It will also potentially help those suffering most from the current and extreme cost of living crisis when literally every penny counts!

Steve - while you and I are from different political traditions and naturally did not always see eye-to-eye when you were a councillor, I nonetheless valued your significant public service and hard work. I enjoyed considering your many well made arguments. Thank you for that and for your two questions today.

2. Question 2 received from Steve Reade

Mayor Norris, as you are undoubtedly aware, there has been a change of administration at South Gloucestershire. There now being a Liberal / Labour coalition. Can you tell me whether you intend trying to convince them to recommence the development of a Spatial Development Strategy and would you encourage them to continue the processes already underway in South Gloucestershire so as to not potentially waste council tax payers money.

Metro Mayor's response:

As you will recall, the SDS (Spatial Development Strategy) process failed when South Gloucestershire under Conservative leadership did not reach agreement with the other councils and the West of England Combined Authority on housing numbers.

Time has now moved on. The local plan process is underway in South Gloucestershire.

There are no plans to reopen the SDS at this time as it could waste time and money, and undermine the ongoing processes in South Gloucestershire and the other two councils.

3. Question 3 received from David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside. Trustee of Bristol Disabled Equalities Forum

What progress is being made? Following Kerry McCartney MP questions to Buses Minister Richard Horton MP on restoring supported bus services in the West of England Mayor Combined Transport Authority and North Somerset Council bus service improvement plan area.

In view of the severe hardship to passenger in some valley areas

On bus routes 179 784 and The midsomer Norton paulton via Radstock town service 82

Working class communities with social exclusion from public transport.

In South Bristol in Ashton vale loss of service 23 to Southvale and Bristol city centre.

Service 5, 47 Bristol city centre St Paul st werburgess Eastville park Stapleton Broomhill Fishponds oisbury court Downend Bromley heath.

506 route from Tesco Eastville Easton st Phillips and to Bristol Temple meads station.

St Anne's park Bristlington Hungerford road area Knowle Hengrove whitchurch Hartcliffe.

Service 10 11 Avonmouth Dock/ shirehampton Westbury on Trym Southmead hospital bus station uwe bus station Bristol parkway and Aztec west Hortham Alverston Thornbury.

We are pleased to see the restoration of service 84 85 Yate park and ride site yate railway station yate bus station chipping sodbury, wickwar, charfield,wotton under edge

Jointly with South Gloucestershire county council and Gloucestershire county council and big lemon buses

126 Weston super mare bus and coach station locking Banwell ,wincombe Axbridge ,cheddar ,Draycott Westbury sub mendip and wells bus and coach station

672 Blagdon chew valley South Bristol and Bristol city centre. Being withdrawn by the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council In july 2023 after Banes withdrawn funding.

With only 10 westlink bus operating in south zone on 7th july 2023 due to driver shortages

Now the bus minister Richard Horton mp has issue clear guidelines on the use of bus service improvement plan money in the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council area and other bus services important plan are what discussion are now taking place the Department for transport about restoring supported bus in the Authorities area working in partnership with westlink Demand responsive bus services.

Who oversees bus service improvement plans as per the minister guidelines to local transport Authorities.

Metro Mayor's response:

Buses are a complicated funding jigsaw. There are three key types of bus services:

1. Commercial services - These are run by a private operator to make a profit.
2. Council-supported services - These are services that do not make a profit but where there is a social need. They are operated by the West of England Combined Authority through contracts with local bus companies but, according to the rules, they cannot compete with commercial services. They are paid for by money raised by local councils through council tax

which is passed onto the West of England Combined Authority via an annual Transport Levy. Earlier this year local councils decided on a real-term cut to such expenditure at a time when bus costs for fuel and staff are going up. We are still seeing the consequences of this feeding through with several bus services having been cut.

I did not have a vote on how much money each council contributes and as Metro Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority I do not have any tax raising powers.

3. Finally there is the Bus Service Improvement Plan money where I secured the second highest amount of government funding in the country. This money also has strings attached. It needs to be for new and innovative services and until very recently specifically could not be spent on maintaining council-supported services.

Very recently, government changed the rules for later in the year - for some funding, by request, but again with caveats such as working to ensure services become commercial.

We are seeking clarification from the Department for Transport about this and in the meantime I have contacted local council leaders with a possible proposal.

In addition, Government have recently provided additional funding of half a million pounds for supported services. I await a paper from officers, that has been discussed with unitary authorities, so that an evidence-led decision on how to spend this money can be made.

However I am sure everyone will agree, it would have been unrealistic if officers had not planned to spend the BSIP money in a way in which the Government rules at the time stated, and waited on the off chance they changed their mind, and then immediately to tear up all the work of the last 12 months on a whim.

4. Question 4 received from David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside. Trustee of Bristol Disabled Equalities Forum

What progress is being made on the westlink Demand responsive bus services zones extension to Railway stations and bus stations and hubs

Northern zone from Hortham to Bristol parkway station Aztec west metro bus stops station Filton Abbey wood station.

Cribbs causeway bus station Southmead hospital bus station.

Westlink Demand responsive bus services should join up with main line bus services and metro west railway stations and services

Winterbourne ,Fishponds ,oidbury court Broomhill Stapleton and Eastville tesco.

Eastgate centre Eastville, Easton St Phillips and Bristol Temple meads station .

So that community that have no public transport service who are social excluded for public transport have access to a Demand response buses service.

And the South zone to cover Bristlington Hungerford road are

Is the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council talking to hard to reach and working class communities about bus services.

Metro Mayor's response:

As I said from day one, WESTlink is new, we have always expected challenges and we are learning as we go along.

I personally agree that it would appear to make sense for WESTlinks to go to certain other places for example Parkway Station but that is just my gut feeling. The West of England MCA is gathering data and once there is enough reliable information that accurately reflects current and anticipated use, it will be in a position to suggest evidence-led tweaks.

The data will include the number and location of passenger trips, length of journey, comparison of on-demand vs pre-booked trips and vehicle use. There will also be analysis of the demand per zone, vehicle allocation to each zone and the impacts of driver shortages.

5. Question 5 received from Dr Phil Collins On behalf of the Sustainable Transport Group, CVAF C&NEWG

Context

Along with Jackie Head I am part of the Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group and in particular the Sustainable Transport subgroup. We have been working since 2021 to get improved public transport services in the ultra rural area of the Chew Valley.

In a survey carried out in 2021 we identified a **desire and need for public transport that was reliable, frequent and that connected people between the villages of the Chew Valley and to the main transport corridors.**

Since January 2021 we have been meeting with a range of stakeholders from B&NES & the Combined Authority, initially with the officers who planned the roll out of WESTlink and now with the team responsible for monitoring the contract. We have also had meetings with Via and weDRT and now have a methodology in place for asking questions and receiving feedback via a shared action register.

Many of the issues we have raised have been addressed and have brought about service improvements but some areas seem to be hard to get action on.

In March we brought together a team of Early Adopters who live, work or travel in the Chew Valley : volunteers willing to swap out present journeys on the 672 or via car for WESTlink journeys, who were willing to accept teething problems and to feed back their experiences.

They complete an online form after every attempted or completed journey.

As well as sending brief summaries each week, we carried out an in depth study of the data once the Early Adopter journeys passed 100 attempts. This evidence-based report ('How is WESTlink doing so far?') has been sent to the Mayor and the Leader of B&NES as well as to other interested parties.

There are 3 clear messages that come through:

- Generally speaking (with a few notable exceptions) **people who have ridden on WESTlink have had a positive experience** and scored the service highly on some key performance indicators: being easy to book, arriving on time and delivering on time, drivers being friendly.
- **43% of the rides taken could not have been taken if WESTlink had not existed:** meaning it is offering something new and enabling some people to travel in ways they could not previously have done.
- **That only 62% of requested rides were completed,** and there are 3 key learnings from this:

a) most commonly the passenger has not been able to get a ride for the journey they want, despite trying in a range of ways to get the service and despite often being flexible about time, sometimes this is because there is not a bus stop close to their home location

b) in some more exceptional circumstances the ride has failed to deliver them at the promised time or has been cancelled at the last minute.

c) **Vital and time sensitive journeys (for work/education/childcare or medical appointments) have been the least well served by the system** and early morning and late afternoon rides have been the most likely to not succeed.

It is clear that WESTlink has been hampered by the driver shortages that are common across the UK, and this may be why supply is not meeting demand. However, we suspect that without a spinal route through the Chew Valley it is likely to never meet demand, and indeed that the Combined Authority underestimated the demand that we are now seeing in the area. We did not underestimate this: WESTlink brings water to the desert, are you surprised that we are thirsty for more?

We have invited the Mayor and the Leader of B&NES Council attend an online meeting on 14th June at 9am to discuss the urgent need to extend the 672 for a further period beyond 31st July, when it is due to be cut, to give WESTlink time to develop the service to the extent where vital journeys can be fulfilled. We have also asked them to reconsider the introduction of a spinal fixed route service in the Chew Valley to take the pressure off

WESTlink and enable a mixed transport system (WESTlink was always designed to complement fixed route services not be the whole transport system)

In the light of this information I have the following question to ask:

Will the Mayor and Combined Authority look closely at the detailed recommendations of the 'How is WESTlink doing so far?' report, and act on them in order to improve the service further and to monitor the carbon saving benefits of introducing this scheme using the carbon calculator tool that we have previously suggested (costing travel by units of carbon saved) and also giving a value to journeys that could not have been taken without WESTlink (in terms of the social isolation deprivation index).

Metro Mayor's response:

As I said from day one, WESTlink is new, we have always expected challenges and we are learning as we go along.

My thanks to the Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group for helping in this important process to refine and improve the service. I am pleased that your studies show many passengers appear to value the service and that it is encouraging new public transport use.

The West of England MCA is also gathering data and once there is enough reliable data that accurately reflects current and anticipated use, it will be in a position to suggest evidence-led tweaks. I note your point about monitoring the carbon saving benefits, which I agree would also be valuable in light of the climate and biodiversity emergency.

The driver shortage remains a very serious ongoing challenge and resources continue to be invested to recruit and retain people in this vital industry. WESTlink is currently 24 drivers short with seven booked into training on 27th June.

It is so important to promote this career – after all bus drivers are community heroes!

6. Question 6 received from Jackie Head, Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group and in particular the Sustainable Transport subgroup.

Context

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They complete an online form after every attempted or completed journey.

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There are 3 clear messages that come through:

- Generally speaking (with a few notable exceptions) **people who have ridden on WESTlink have had a positive experience** and scored the service highly on some key performance indicators: being easy to book, arriving on time and delivering on time, drivers being friendly.
- **43% of the rides taken could not have been taken if WESTlink had not existed:** meaning it is offering something new and enabling some people to travel in ways they could not previously have done.
- **That only 62% of requested rides were completed,** and there are 3 key learnings from this:

a) most commonly the passenger has not been able to get a ride for the journey they want, despite trying in a range of ways to get the service and despite often being flexible about time, sometimes this is because there is not a bus stop close to their home location

b) in some more exceptional circumstances the ride has failed to deliver them at the promised time or has been cancelled at the last minute.

c) **Vital and time sensitive journeys (for work/education/childcare or medical appointments) have been the least well served by the system** and early morning and late afternoon rides have been the most likely to not succeed.

It is clear that WESTlink has been hampered by the driver shortages that are common across the UK, and this may be why supply is not meeting demand. However, we suspect that without a spinal route through the Chew Valley it is likely to never meet demand, and indeed that the Combined Authority underestimated the demand that we are now seeing in the area. We did not underestimate this: WESTlink brings water to the desert, are you surprised that we are thirsty for more?

We have invited the Mayor and the Leader of B&NES Council attend an online meeting on 14th June at 9am to discuss the urgent need to extend the 672 for a further period beyond 31st July, when it is due to be cut, to give WESTlink time to develop the service to the extent where vital journeys can be fulfilled. We have also asked them to reconsider the introduction of a spinal fixed route service in the Chew Valley to take the pressure off WESTlink and enable a mixed transport system (WESTlink was always designed to complement fixed route services not be the whole transport system)

In the light of this information we have the following question to ask:

Will the Mayor and the Leader of B&NES council agree on a funding package which enables the 672 to continue until such time as WESTlink has a full complement of drivers and can deliver vital journeys?

Metro Mayor's response:

As I said from day one, WESTlink is new, we have always expected challenges and we are learning as we go along.

My thanks to the Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group for helping in this important process to refine and improve the service.

I am pleased that your studies show many passengers appear to value the service and that it is encouraging new public transport use.

The West of England MCA is also gathering data and once there is enough reliable data that accurately reflects current and anticipated use, it will be in a position to suggest evidence-led tweaks.

As you point out driver shortages remain an ongoing challenge. That is why there is a huge programme of work going on to encourage people to take up this career. I would encourage everyone to get behind this.

Supported buses are the responsibility of local councils to fund. In recent weeks Government provided some additional funding for supported buses and gave notice they would change BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) rules. Clarification is being sought from government of the details, conditions and process around any change of scope for the BSIP funding. At the same time, officers are reviewing the overall progress of the BSIP implementation programme to understand what opportunity might exist to take advantage of this new flexibility.

In addition, Government have recently provided additional funding of £515k for supported services. I await a paper from officers, that has been discussed with unitary authorities, so that an evidence-led decision on how to spend this money can be made. In the meantime, I have contacted local council leaders.

7. Question 7 received from Jackie Head, Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group and in particular the Sustainable Transport subgroup.

Will the Metro Mayor revisit the idea of a permanent fixed route service to provide a spine through the Chew Valley (this could be increasing the frequency of the 672 or revisiting the proposed BSIP fixed route services (526 & 527) or variations on these, which were costed, put out to tender and bid for last year?

Metro Mayor's response:

When money becomes available through councils who fund supported buses, or from Government all bus routes should be looked at on merit. Costing, putting out to tender and bidding does not give any commitment to procure – as it is in part a fact finding exercise.

8. Question 8 received from Saskia Heijltjes, Green Party Councillor for Lambridge

The Combined Authority has declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and has recently stated that the number of miles driven in private cars needs to be reduced by 40% by 2030.

Parents driving children to school creates car journeys and in Bath alone 51% of car trips between 8am and 9am are related to education.

School streets are restrictions on traffic in front of a school, at school opening and closing times to improve road safety and air quality and has shown to increase the number of children travelling actively to school, which benefits the health and well-being of children and would enable a substantial reduction in vehicle miles across the Combined Authority.

Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council have both delivered several school streets, while Bath and North East Somerset hasn't yet delivered a single one.

Will the Combined Authority create a school street strategy for the region, to speed up this important scheme to create safer streets for children, improve air quality, and reduce congestion?

The Metro Mayor's response:

As Mayor I wholeheartedly agree that the climate emergency is something we must take urgent action to address.

As recognised in the West of England Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan 2023 the region needs to substantially reduce the use of the private cars by around 40%, both in terms of the number of trips and their length. This includes journeys to schools.

The West of England MCA is continuing its work with schools to encourage children living within walking and cycling distance to choose this way of getting to and from school. Thank you for your ideas. School streets will be given consideration as part of the update to the Joint Local Transport Plan.

9. Question 9 received from Andrew Smith, Reclaim Our Buses

Does the funding for the "Birthday Bus" Scheme come from Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding?

The Metro Mayor's response:

Yes

10. Question 10 received from Andrew Smith, Reclaim Our Buses

It has been the Authority's stance that money from the BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) cannot be used to support existing services or reinstate cut services.

However, we asked the DfT the following FOI question (where 'above' refers to CRSTS and BSIP funding):

"What are the restrictions on how sums, from the above, could be used for bus services in the West of England? Are there restrictions with regard to supporting existing services, or reinstating cut services?"

The DfT responded with:

"The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding provided to the Combined Authority is revenue (otherwise known as resource) funding and is intended to be used to help transform bus services. The BSIP funding is not intended to support existing service levels and patterns, but to support services which would otherwise not be provided. The Department has agreed with the Authority a programme for how they will use the funding, details of which can be found in their published Enhanced Partnership scheme."

The only interpretation of this that makes sense is that the funding should not be used for existing commercially viable services. If the DfT wanted to explicitly prevent the use of BSIP funding to support and reinstate cut services, they could have said so. In fact, it explicitly does state that funding can be used "to support services which would otherwise not be provided". This, by definition, includes cut services.

Furthermore "Delivery Plan I: Non-intensive services" in the BSIP states:

"We will also need a strong provision of supported services throughout the region which feed our interchange hubs and connect to bus routes on the core corridors."

So, the funding is for a delivery plan that explicitly states supporting services.

Nowhere in the DfT's response nor in the BSIP does it state that the services must be "new and innovative".

Does the mayor agree that there is no impediment to him using the BSIP funding to support existing services, and reinstate cut ones?

The Metro Mayor's response:

It was not a "stance", it was Government policy. Only schemes which met the policy could be worked up. It would have been unrealistic if officers had not planned to spend the BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) money in a way in which the Government rules at the time stated, and waited on the off chance that they later changed their mind. Clarification is now being sought from government of the details, conditions and process around any change of scope for the BSIP funding. At the same time, officers are reviewing the overall progress of the BSIP implementation programme to understand what opportunity might exist to take advantage of any new flexibility. In the meantime, I have contacted local council leaders.

11. Question 11 received from James Ardon

Please can you explain why Long Aston park and ride has not been included in the Zones for westlink? There have been repeated requests via the chew valley bus transition group but it feels like this has been ignored. Please can you explain the reasoning for this as this would prove an efficient route into Bristol especially for commuters who are struggling to get into work on time when using the current routes offered by westlink and fits in with your current strategy of connecting to existing routes.

Metro Mayor's response:

As I said from day one, WESTlink is new, we have always expected challenges and we are learning as we go along. The West of England MCA is gathering data and once there is enough reliable data that accurately reflects current and anticipated use, it will be in a position to suggest evidence-led tweaks. Long Aston Park and Ride will certainly be considered as part of this process.

12. Question 12 received from James Ardron

Can you confirm that the views of the Westlink drivers are being taken into consideration in order to improve the current service. (providing benefit for all). If so please can you provide evidence of how this process works, where it has been applied and the timeline to implement any suggested improvements.

Metro Mayor's response:

The views of drivers definitely should, and are, being taken into consideration.

13. Question 13 received from Roger Spours-Bayliff

Despite WESTlink being in operation for just over two months, the 672 remains full on most days. This is due to users, not been able to book a WESTlink to go to work etc. With the 672 going at the end of July and Westlink availability not being up to standard, are there any plans to extend the 672 while these issues are being resolved?

As I understand, there is no timeline to implement the full 30 Westlink buses due to Driver shortages, and there is an availability issue in getting a West link due to high demand, especially in the Chew Valley. how are you managing this risk and what are the plans to ensure rural areas like the Chew Valley have adequate travel infrastructure, which will especially benefit low-income workers and those who want to reduce emissions.

Metro Mayor's response:

WESTlinks are not replacements for local subsidised bus services cut by our local councils, they are instead intended to take people to main line routes to increase the overall use of buses where, concerningly, passenger numbers have been falling. That local councils have decided to reduce the real terms funding they make available for subsidised bus services is having a very negative impact on local individuals and communities alike. Such is the scale of local councils' real terms cuts to local subsidised bus services, WESTlink is unfortunately unable to offset the full impact.

14. Question 14 received from Angela Ardron

As there is clearly a demand for bus service in with the chew valley and being the highest adopters of west link. Are you planning to revisit a fixed service to help complement westlink and ensure availability for all, helping to improve the westlink service by reducing overall pressure for services during peak times?

Metro Mayor's response

Buses are a complicated funding jigsaw. There are three key types of buses:

1. Commercial buses. These are run by a private operator to make a profit.
2. Council-supported buses are buses that don't make a profit but where there is a social need. Rules also say they can't compete with commercial services. They are paid for by money raised by local councils through council tax. Councils then pay a sum of money of their choosing known as the transport levy to the West of England Combined Authority to buy in the buses the councils want. Earlier this year local Councils decided on a real-term cut to such expenditure at a time when bus costs for fuel and staff are going up. We are still seeing the consequences of this feeding through. This is why the council funded bus is being cut.

I did not have a vote on how much money each council contributes and as Metro Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority I do not have any tax raising powers.

Councils can still put additional money into these services at any time.

- Finally there is the Bus Service Improvement Plan money where I secured the second highest amount of government funding in the country. This money also has strings attached. It needs to be for new and innovative services and until very recently specifically could not be spent on maintaining council-supported services. Very recently government changed the rules for later in the year - for some funding, by request, but again with caveats such as working to ensure services become commercial. I have contacted local council leaders with a proposal and am waiting for further clarification from government.

15. Question 15 received from Angela Ardron

Can you give an indication of how financially viable westlink is to date and the figure needed in terms of passenger number per bus to make this viable. Can you also include where people are unable to book a service showing demand but unavailability.

Metro Mayor's response:

As I said from day one, WESTlink is new, we have always expected challenges and we are learning as we go along.

Data being collected will include the number and location of passenger trips, length of journey, comparison of on-demand vs pre-booked trips and vehicle use. There will also be analysis on demand per zone, vehicle allocation to each zone and the impacts of driver shortages. Like you I am also keen to know about unavailability, having been told "no" by the app twice in the last fortnight!

16. Question 16 received from Cllr Joanna Wright, Bath & North East Somerset Council

B&NES Council recently bid for funding from Active Travel England (ATE) Tranche 4 and failed to receive any funding for the one scheme they requested with an estimated budget of £2.7 million. This budget was outside the funding envelope that B&NES was allowed to bid for.

Why was B&NES allowed to put in a bid that likely to fail under the ATE and the Combined Authority's criteria's?

Metro Mayor's response:

This walking and cycling scheme put forward for funding through Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 was submitted in collaboration with BANES Council as part of the development of the funding submission.

A multi criteria assessment framework was created based on the Active Travel England criteria and key weighting to score the schemes that the Unitary Authorities had put forward.

17. Question 17 received from Laura Fogg Rogers, Councillor, Winterbourne PC

Mr Norris has stated in public that he does not support investigating franchising as it will take too long to implement, and that we have a bus crisis now.

On behalf of Winterbourne residents, in South Gloucestershire, we would therefore like to raise the issue of young people who cannot access their schools and colleges due to bus cuts to the Y3, Y4, 626, 202, 458 and 459, leaving Winterbourne cut off from Bristol, Yate, and other local areas, and young people facing difficulty accessing education.

Can you explain what immediate measures your office can take to reinstate our local bus services, ensuring young people can access schools and colleges, and ensuring local residents can respond decisively to the climate emergency by reducing their dependency on private cars?

Metro Mayor's response:

I have always said that franchising is on the table. But it is a lengthy process and we have an issue to address in the meantime, which is that buses are a complicated funding jigsaw. There are three key types of bus services:

1. Commercial services - These are run by a private operator to make a profit.
2. Council-supported services - These are services that don't make a profit but where there is a social need. They are operated by the West of England Combined Authority through contracts with local bus companies but, according to the rules, they can't compete with commercial services. They are paid for by money raised by local councils through council tax which is passed onto the West of England Combined Authority via an annual Transport Levy. Earlier this year local councils decided on a real-term cut to such expenditure at a time when bus costs for fuel and staff are going up. We are still seeing the consequences of this feeding through with several bus services having been cut.

I did not have a vote on how much money each council contributes and as Metro Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority I do not have any tax raising powers.

3. Finally there is the Bus Service Improvement Plan money where I secured the second highest amount of government funding in the country. This money also has strings attached. It needs to be for new and innovative services and until very recently specifically could not be spent on maintaining council-supported services. Very recently government changed the rules for later in the year - for some funding, by request, but again with caveats such as working to ensure services become commercial. We are seeking clarification from the Department for Transport about this.

18. Question 18 received from Sharon Hancock

Do the West of England Combined Authority leaders agree that it's irresponsible to not spend money on investigating bus franchising, costing around £3 million compared to £15 million for an underground study, when thousands are impacted by loss of their buses right now compared to an underground which will take a considerable amount of time, if it does go ahead.

Metro Mayor's response:

The two are not linked. I believe it would be irresponsible to spend an additional £15million or any other sum of money on further work into new public transport if experts say a particular type of scheme is not value for money.

19. Question 19 received from Clive Turner

The cancellation of these vital rural BANES buses has caused serious disruption to thousands of people's lives.

The reaction by those affected has been enormous and growing by the day. DRT is no substitute for regular buses in this instance so for many they have no regular bus service something which many depended on.

Q. Having now realised the actual extent of the damage the withdrawal of these buses has done, what is the Authority intending to do to now provide a sensible solution?

Metro Mayor's response:

When buses are cancelled passengers are understandably upset and inconvenienced. As I have said repeatedly WESTlink has never, ever been suggested by myself as a replacement for traditional bus services.

Buses are a complicated funding jigsaw. There are three key types of bus services:

1. Commercial services - These are run by a private operator to make a profit.
2. Council-supported services - These are services that don't make a profit but where there is a social need. They are operated by the West of England Combined Authority through contracts with local bus companies but, according to the rules, they can't compete with commercial services. They are paid for by money raised by local councils through council tax which is passed onto the West of England Combined Authority via an annual Transport Levy. Earlier this year local councils decided on a real-term cut to such expenditure at a time when bus costs for fuel and staff are going up. We are still seeing the consequences of this feeding through with several bus services having been cut.

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working to ensure services become commercial. We are seeking clarification from the Department for Transport about this and in the meantime I have contacted local council leaders with a possible proposal. However I'm sure everyone will agree, it would have been unrealistic if officers had not planned to spend the BSIP money in a way in which the Government rules at the time stated, and waited on the off chance they changed their mind. In addition Government have recently provided additional funding of £515k for supported services. I await paper from officers, that has been discussed with unitary authorities, so that an evidence-led decision on how to spend this money can be made.

20. Question 20 received from Annie Watson

Just a simple question...

Please can you prevent rural isolation by supporting these 2 rural bus services [768 &179] that provide a reliable, dependable and essential transport route into Bath?

Metro Mayor's response:

Buses are a complicated funding jigsaw. There are three key types of bus services:

1. Commercial services - These are run by a private operator to make a profit.
2. Council-supported services - These are services that don't make a profit but where there is a social need. They are operated by the West of England Combined Authority through contracts with local bus companies but, according to the rules, they can't compete with commercial services. They are paid for by money raised by local councils through council tax which is passed onto the West of England Combined Authority via an annual Transport Levy. Earlier this year local councils decided on a real-term cut to such expenditure at a time when bus costs for fuel and staff are going up. We are still seeing the consequences of this feeding through with several bus services having been cut.

I did not have a vote on how much money each council contributes and as Metro Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority I do not have any tax raising powers.

3. Finally there is the Bus Service Improvement Plan money where I secured the second highest amount of government funding in the country. This money also has strings attached. It needs to be for new and innovative services and until very recently specifically could not be spent on maintaining council-supported services. Very recently government changed the rules for later in the year - for some funding, by request, but again with caveats such as working to ensure services become commercial. We are seeking clarification from the Department for Transport about this and in the meantime I have contacted local council leaders with a possible proposal. However I'm sure everyone will agree, it would have been unrealistic if officers had not planned to spend the BSIP money in a way in which the Government rules at the time stated, and waited on the off chance they changed their

mind. In addition Government have recently provided additional funding of £515k for supported services. I await paper from officers, that has been discussed with unitary authorities, so that an evidence-led decision on how to spend this money can be made.

21. Question 21 received from Steve Brown

Why spend money giving people a month free Bus travel for their birthday month, when the people using the Bus were Bus users already ? You either use the Bus or not, giving a month free will not encourage Bus usage, just reward those that already use the Bus.

This money could have been used to support Bus services that have now been withdrawn.

Metro Mayor's response:

Because we need to get new people using public transport if we are going to have a viable public transport network in the long term and meet our important climate change goals.

As Mayor when I talk to people right across our area and indeed the country, I detect real excitement and enthusiasm about this birthday bus plan. It is backed by all the major bus companies and Bus Users UK, who called it "an absolutely fantastic initiative." I urge people to get behind a scheme that would help people during this frightening cost of living crisis and actually try to drive up passenger numbers rather than offer shorter term sticking plaster solutions that don't seek to deal with the reason for the recent falling bus use.

The BSIP budget is designed to grow the bus network and get more people using it. Our BSIP has the aim of growing passenger numbers by 24% by 2030. However the budget is very time limited (to March 2025) so focus has to be on interventions are self-sustaining and encourage behaviour change in the long term. Interventions that require ongoing subsidies are less effective as the public benefits stop as soon as the BSIP budget ends.

The logic behind the birthday fares offer is that:

- those people using the buses pre-pandemic have largely returned, however they are taking fewer trips than before;
- if we are going to grow the number of bus passengers we need to appeal to those who currently do not use the buses;
- in many cases people do not use the bus because using the car has become the default type of transport – even where there is a suitable public transport option;

- of those who use the bus there is a high level of satisfaction and the long term trend on passenger growth (pre-covid) was upward (unlike most of England);
- there is also significant scope for further growth given that only 9% of commutes are by public transport (and 66% of commutes are by car).

Therefore those people who take up the offer of free travel for a month may discover that it is quicker and easier than they thought and decide to switch mode for some of their trips.

Research has shown that free public transport offers can result in both immediate demand growth and longer term behaviour change.

The introduction of free travel unsurprisingly results in increased public transport usage, for example Tallin (14% increase). Free transport for state employees in Hesse Germany led to a 12% increase in public transport use where the main beneficiaries were poorer, women and older employees. More important were the wider changes in attitude to both public transport (improved) and car use (negative).

Randomised experiments conducted in Kyoto and Copenhagen where drivers were given free public transport travel for a month both showed significant increase in public transport use during the experiment and importantly continued (albeit declining) bus /public transport use after the experiment and longer term improved attitudes to bus use. “The results suggest that a temporary structural change, may be an important tool for converting car travel demand to public-transport travel demand”.

Limited-period fare free public transport has been used successfully in the Swedish city of Gothenburg (roughly the same population as Bristol) to boost the public transport use. In 2019, the regional transport agency handed out 30,000 free 2-week passes valid for travel on buses and trams. This was part of a long-running outreach campaign to encourage residents to use transport services and to double the number of journeys made by public transport by 2025. They have had 30 such ‘test-ride’ campaigns since 2010 and estimates that around 20% of those receiving the free tickets, or 100,000 residents, have become regular users of public transport as a result.

Potential Impacts

The outcomes we will be looking at for this scheme are

- Overall use of the free birthday tickets
- Increased bus use during the (12 month) offer
- Increased bus use once the offer has ended (behaviour change)
- Changes in attitudes to bus use

Clearly any assessment of the likely impact will be speculative but just to provide a sense of scale.

- There are currently approx. 50m bus trips pa in the region.
- If this scheme achieves a 1% increase in bus use that would mean an additional 500k bus trips pa.
 - A 1% outcome is not unreasonable given the research above (10% use the scheme of which 10% continue using buses)
 - 500k additional bus trips pa generates over £1m pa of fare income into the bus industry plus the additional benefits from reduced congestion and carbon reduction.
 - Our agreement with first bus is that the benefits of any growth in passenger numbers will be shared between First bus and the Combined Authority/NSC with the public sector getting 75% of any increased revenue.

Other important benefits – data

The data collected from the birthday travel tickets will be a vital resource. These users, who have taken the trouble to access the tickets, will be the most engaged existing and potential users. In particular the new bus users will be the cohort nearest to making the transition to bus. Understanding their travel patterns and needs will be vital for us and bus companies for planning future services and investments and tailoring future interventions to get the most growth in bus use.

Other important benefits – time

The fact that this scheme is spread over 12 months ensures that

- the risk of overcrowding is minimised,

- it allows us to monitor data throughout a calendar year, and
- it allows us to refine and develop the marketing and publicity for the scheme – avoiding one big bang.

I really hope that Birthday Buses will act as a catalyst for bus travel in the West of England to boost the number of passengers and, with a whole month of free travel, encourage a long-term shift in travel behaviour. We really need more people using buses to help reach our net zero targets and keep ourselves, and the planet, breathing.

22. Question 22 received from Kim Hicks, South Bristol Wrong Road Group

BACKGROUND:

It is understood that Transport authorities need to prepare a workable document to be known as the Local Transport Plan. This will “develop policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport to, from and within an area.

The “South East Bristol Low Carbon Orbital Corridor” was in the JLTP4 although is not currently an active plan in any way. It is understood that there is no longer the funding to install the route and there was virtually no support for it in the last consultation-there has not even been a feasibility study on the route through/on Whitchurch Lane. It also goes against so many recent emergency announcements.

Local people are extremely concerned that it will **substantially increase the levels of traffic, AND pollution** on a residential road that is next to a junior school with 600+ pupils. The route would also **destroy parts of our unreplaceable, valuable Green Belt**.

Leaving the route in the plan just causes *unnecessary stress* and *anguish* for 1000’s of people. Local people have already had this hanging over them, for a number of years now.

It is also worth noting that responding to the JLTP4 consultation, **over a third of all responses** were against the idea of the proposed route. Bearing in mind that the consultation went out to approx. 1.5 million people in the The Authority area. The Authority was quite clearly informed the people did not want to have our Green Belt destroyed OR considerable amounts of additional traffic on a totally unsuitable residential road.

The idea of the route, “South East Bristol Low Carbon Orbital Corridor”, IS NOT safe or efficient and the impact of it would go against the various emergencies etc e.g., environmental and ecological. It is also unaffordable.

It is cruel, on local residents, to keep the unaffordable, ill thought through, polluting route, that will destroy our precious Green Belt in the plan. This is especially so because there is virtually no support, need or money for it!

QUESTION:

Please will you consider removing “South East Bristol Low Carbon Orbital Corridor”, from the revised transport plan (JLTP4/5)?

However, if the Authority plan to keep the route, in the updated JLTP4/5, please could you explain why it will not be removed when your previous consultation quite clearly confirmed that 1000’s of people were against it.

Metro Mayor’s response:

The current Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP) was adopted by the West of England Joint Committee in March 2020. We are awaiting new guidance from the Department for Transport on Local Transport Plans, and Item 11 on the agenda of the 16 June 2023 Combined Authority Committee recommends the allocation of funding to update the JLTP. This update will include a review of the transport major scheme programme in the current JLTP against the objectives set out in the guidance and commitments to decarbonise the transport network, this will include the South-East Bristol Orbital Low Carbon Corridor. However, as Mayor I do not support this.

23. Question 23 received from Adam Reynolds

The TRANSPORT SCHEMES Report.

Regarding recommendation 2 on "Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding", successful bids, as outlined in paragraphs 2.2.1 to 2.2.4 of the report are not required to keep charging infrastructure in the carriageway and off the pavement space. Neither is there a requirement that all on-street charging points are paired with a car club space.

To maximise access to EV cars, tackling private car ownership, and ensuring installations do not impact footway accessibility, I would request that the requirements for any on-street EV charging bid to require placement of EV charging systems in the carriageway and to be paired with car club space and this is expressly stated in this report and any future bid requirements.

Metro Mayor’s response:

Placing EV charging points is the responsibility of the local councils. My overriding concern is that councils do not slow down the process of installing them.

24. Question 24 received from Dan Ackroyd

My understanding is that the amount of funding approved by Active Travel England for "Active Travel Fund tranche 4" is lower than hoped due to some proposed applications not being of high enough quality, and previously approved schemes not being finished, or constructed to standard.

However, the actual facts are very opaque. To note, there is an open Freedom of Information request for information that hasn't been responded to.

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/active_travel_england_active_tra

People really shouldn't have to submit FOI requests for this information.

Will WECA commit to publishing details of applications for funding for Active Travel England, including for each proposed application:

- * if it was not put forward, why the decision was taken to not put it forward.
- * why funding was declined.
- * status updates of any approved funding applications until they are completed.

and to keep that published information up-to-date?

If people in Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council are for some reason losing out on central government funding, we need to know why, so the problem can be fixed.

Metro Mayor's response:

I was delighted that the £3.6m of Active Travel Tranche 4 funding that was secured was higher than the indicative allocation for the West of England MCA originally communicated by Active Travel England. This is good news for residents who choose to walk, cycle or wheel.

The West of England MCA will work with the Unitary Authorities to make as much of the information relating to this issue as possible publicly available.

The details of the funding was embargoed until the Friday 19th May 2023. The focus now needs to be on delivering these schemes.

25. Question 25 received from Dan Ackroyd

This question is related to the "Investment fund programme - Approve the Strategic Outline Case for Western Harbour"

There is an ongoing conversation about what a mass transit system for Bristol could look like; parts of it might be an underground, parts of it might be a tram network.

Currently the 'Strategic Outline Case' does not appear to mention the word tram in it at all.

There are very few usable crossings from south to north Bristol. It would be an incredible tragedy if and when Bristol actually gets around to building a tram network that we found that the Cumberland Basin crossing should be a vital part of it, but because the masterplanning didn't factor that in, it was impossible.

This "masterplan concept report" and "highway alignment feasibility"

is going ahead in the last year of the term of office of the Mayor of Bristol. We all know he is very keen on an underground system built, but to most of us that seems unlikely to happen.

Is it possible to either delay this work by a year, or to set a requirement that the "highway alignment feasibility" includes reserving space for tram stops in the work done?

Additionally, please stop calling it the "Western Harbour" it is hugely disrespectful to deliberately use the wrong name of an area of the city.

Metro Mayor's response:

Work to complete the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for Future4WEST is ongoing and so no decision on the type of transport has been taken. When this is completed, as Mayor I will only support further work on options which provide value for money.

Officers will work as far as possible to ensure the projects are compatible and are future proofed.

I note your concerns to the Western Harbour, rather than alternatives such as the western end of the Floating Harbour. Bristol City Council is leading work on the masterplan, so it would be more appropriate to table this concern to the city council directly.

26. Question 26 received from Evelyn Cox

Now that WECA understands its £57million can be used to support existing rural bus services, and BANES did increase its funding at the last budget, will WECA urgently reinstate rural bus routes such as the 768 that remain the only public reliable regular transportation for many rural communities?

Metro Mayor's response:

B&NES Council have made real terms cuts to localised subsidised buses initially indicating they would increase the transport levy by up to 10%. In the event it was a zero increase.

Very recently government indicated they would show flexibility on the use of future BSIP funding for later in the year. Some funding, by request and with caveats, may be able to be spent on supported buses. We will have to see the detail of what they are proposing to know what might be possible in future. To be clear, there is not £57 million sitting in a bank account.

In addition around half-a-million pounds has been made available by Government specifically for supported services.

When money becomes available, all bus routes will need be looked at on merit. There will not be enough to meet everyone's request for subsidised bus services.

However I'm sure everyone will agree, it would have been unrealistic if officers had not made plans to spend the BSIP money in a way in which the Government rules at the time stated, and instead did nothing! Waiting on the off chance a Government might, or might not, change their mind months or years later about how that money could be spent is not logical or efficient - particularly at this time of record high transport inflation (it has been over 40%).

The devil will be in the detail and we are seeking clarification from the Department for Transport about what might be possible. In the meantime, I have contacted local council leaders with a proposal and we will have to see what funding might become available.

27. Question 27 received from Evelyn Cox

What research supports the notion that a subsidy for a flat rate (£2 bus fare) or free birthday rides are the most cost-effective way to increase the use of public transportation?

Metro Mayor's response:

Work to develop the fares package element of the Bus Service Improvement Plan has drawn on research into the benefits that free and discounted public transport fares can bring, in particular in growing public transport use and changing travel behaviour for the long term.

I really hope that Birthday Buses will act as a catalyst for bus travel in the West of England to boost the number of passengers and, with a whole month of free travel, encourage a long-term shift in travel behaviour. It is backed by all the major bus companies and Bus Users UK, who called it "an absolutely fantastic initiative."

The BSIP budget is designed to grow the bus network and get more people using it. Our BSIP has the aim of growing passenger numbers by 24% by 2030. However the budget is very time

limited (to March 2025) so focus has to be on interventions that are self-sustaining and encourage behaviour change in the long term. Interventions that require ongoing subsidies are less effective as the public benefits stop as soon as the BSIP budget ends.

The logic behind the birthday fares offer is that:

- those people using the buses pre-pandemic have largely returned, however they are taking fewer trips than before;
- if we are going to grow the number of bus passengers we need to appeal to those who currently do not use the buses;
- in many cases people do not use the bus because using the car has become the default type of transport – even where there is a suitable public transport option;
- of those who use the bus there is a high level of satisfaction and the long term trend on passenger growth (pre-covid) was upward (unlike most of England);
- there is also significant scope for further growth given that only 9% of commutes are by public transport (and 66% of commutes are by car).

Therefore those people who take up the offer of free travel for a month may discover that it is quicker and easier than they thought and decide to switch mode for some of their trips.

Research has shown that free public transport offers can result in both immediate demand growth and longer term behaviour change.

The introduction of free travel unsurprisingly results in increased public transport usage, for example Tallin (14% increase). Free transport for state employees in Hesse Germany led to a 12% increase in public transport use where the main beneficiaries were poorer, women and older employees. More important were the wider changes in attitude to both public transport (improved) and car use (negative).

Randomised experiments conducted in Kyoto and Copenhagen where drivers were given free public transport travel for a month both showed significant increase in public transport use during the experiment and importantly continued (albeit declining) bus /public transport use after the experiment and longer term improved attitudes to bus use. “The results suggest that a temporary structural change, may be an important tool for converting car travel demand to public-transport travel demand”.

Limited-period fare free public transport has been used successfully in the Swedish city of Gothenburg (roughly the same population as Bristol) to boost the public transport use. In 2019, the regional transport agency handed out 30,000 free 2-week passes valid for travel on buses and trams. This was part of a long-running outreach campaign to encourage residents to use transport services and to double the number of journeys made by public transport by 2025. They have had 30 such 'test-ride' campaigns since 2010 and estimates that around 20% of those receiving the free tickets, or 100,000 residents, have become regular users of public transport as a result.

Potential Impacts

The outcomes we will be looking at for this scheme are

- Overall use of the free birthday tickets
- Increased bus use during the (12 month) offer
- Increased bus use once the offer has ended (behaviour change)
- Changes in attitudes to bus use

Clearly any assessment of the likely impact will be speculative but just to provide a sense of scale.

- There are currently approx. 50m bus trips pa in the region.
- If this scheme achieves a 1% increase in bus use that would mean an additional 500k bus trips pa.
 - A 1% outcome is not unreasonable given the research above (10% use the scheme of which 10% continue using buses)
 - 500k additional bus trips pa generates over £1m pa of fare income into the bus industry plus the additional benefits from reduced congestion and carbon reduction.
 - Our agreement with first bus is that the benefits of any growth in passenger numbers will be shared between First bus and the Combined Authority/NSC with the public sector getting 75% of any increased revenue.

Other important benefits – data

The data collected from the birthday travel tickets will be a vital resource. These users, who have taken the trouble to access the tickets, will be the most engaged existing and potential users. In particular the new bus users will be the cohort nearest to making the transition to bus. Understanding their travel patterns and needs will be vital for us and bus companies for planning future services and investments and tailoring future interventions to get the most growth in bus use.

Other important benefits – time

The fact that this scheme is spread over 12 months ensures that

- the risk of overcrowding is minimised,
- it allows us to monitor data throughout a calendar year, and
- it allows us to refine and develop the marketing and publicity for the scheme – avoiding one big bang.

I really hope that Birthday Buses will act as a catalyst for bus travel in the West of England to boost the number of passengers and, with a whole month of free travel, encourage a long-term shift in travel behaviour. For people who are already bus users this is a free month of travel to help them during this frightening cost-of-living crisis. We really need more people using buses to help reach our net zero targets and keep ourselves, and the planet, breathing.

On the £1/£2 offer as this is now happening nationwide it will be more appropriate to monitor its effectiveness at a national level as there will be more data to draw on.

28. Question 28 received from Cllr Tim Kent, Bristol City Council

The Metro Mayor recently announced his £8m bus travel fund for free travel during people's birthday month. A poll I recently ran showed 4 out of 5 people did not think this a good use of public money (see attached photo). Can Mayor Norris confirm whether his 'birthday gift' scheme has been approved by the West of England Authority and all its constituent authorities?

Metro Mayor's response:

Though I'm not a mathematician, I am clear that 43 votes on Twitter is a tad unlikely to have much statistical weight! By contrast, I am however sure that would not stop certain political parties using it as a misleading bar chart.

Decisions of the officers of the West of England Combined Authority are in accordance with the governance arrangements agreed by the West of England Combined Authority Committee on 1 July 2022. At the meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Committee on Wednesday 18th January 2023 the delegation was approved unanimously.

I really hope that Birthday Buses will act as a catalyst for bus travel in the West of England to boost the number of passengers and, with a whole month of free travel, encourage a long-term shift in travel behaviour. It is backed by all the major bus companies and Bus Users UK, who called it "an absolutely fantastic initiative."

For people who are already bus users this is a free month of travel to help them during this frightening cost-of-living crisis.

But I also hope Birthday Buses give more people who aren't already regular bus passengers the perfect opportunity to jump on the bus and try it out. We really need more people using buses to help reach our net zero targets and keep ourselves, and the planet, breathing.

29. Question 29 received from Cllr Tim Kent, Bristol City Council

The Government have now clarified that BSIP money can be used to support subsidised bus routes. The community of South Whitchurch has been left with no bus route since April. Can the mayor instruct officers to immediately consult on reintroducing a 516 bus route, on an hourly frequency, so this community can be reconnected to the network and the city?

Metro Mayor's response:

Very recently the Government indicated they would show flexibility on the use of future BSIP funding for later in the year. Some funding, by request and with caveats, may be able to be spent on supported buses. We will have to see the detail of what they are proposing to know what might be possible in future. To be clear, there is not £57 million sitting in a bank account.

In addition around half-a-million pounds has been made available by Government specifically for supported services.

When money becomes available, all bus routes will need to be looked at on merit. There will not be enough to meet everyone's request for subsidised bus services.

However I'm sure everyone will agree, it would have been unrealistic if officers had not made plans to spend the BSIP money in a way in which the Government rules at the time stated, and instead did nothing! Waiting on the off chance a Government might, or might not, change their mind months or years later about how that money could be spent is not logical or efficient - particularly at this time of record high transport inflation (it has been over 40%).

The devil will be in the detail and we are seeking clarification from the Department for Transport about what might be possible. In the meantime, I have contacted local council leaders with a proposal and we will have to see what funding might become available.

30. Question 30 received from Hal MacFie, Councillor, Bath and North East Somerset Council

What data are you collecting on the performance of the West Link service? In particular we are interested for each ward or service the number of times a transport request was accepted or denied each week?

Metro Mayor's response

The West of England MCA is gathering data on WESTlink and once there is enough reliable information that accurately reflects current and anticipated use, it will be in a position to suggest evidence-led tweaks.

The data will include the number and location of passenger trips, length of journey, comparison of on-demand vs pre-booked trips and vehicle use. There will also be analysis of the demand per zone, vehicle allocation to each zone and the impacts of driver shortages.

31. Question 31 received from Maria Carvalho (on Behalf of Reclaim Our Buses)

Will the next WECA committee meeting (not the one being held on June 16th 2023) hold a vote to release a "Notice Of Intent To Prepare An Assessment Of Bus Franchising Scheme" to allow a detailed assessment to begin and to put franchising on the table? If not, can you outline the reasons for why this vote will not be held?

Metro Mayor's response:

Bus franchising is on the table as a possible option. On the face of it, it appears to offer certain advantages. I therefore support further work ahead of any more formal commitments. Sadly, franchising it is not a silver bullet some would have us believe, nor is it public ownership. Franchising campaigners often refer to other Combined Authorities like Greater Manchester, which years ago started the long process of introducing franchising. I am watching closely the progress of my good friend and colleague Andy Burnham on this issue. However there are big differences, for example - and crucially - Manchester also has a tram system which can be used to cross-subsidise costs. We do not have this very important advantage having allowed ourselves to miss out on a new tram system due to arguments between two of our local councils which saw us lose this funding (it instead went to Nottingham which, to its credit, now has a fantastic system). Any losses made on a West of England franchised system of course would become the liability of us locally, so we need to tread carefully as we decide the very best way forward for our bus system.

32. Question 32 received from Maria Carvalho (on Behalf of Reclaim Our Buses)

Can the WECA committee outline the reasons for why franchising is not being formally considered given the strong evidence and community support behind it?

Metro Mayor's response:

Bus franchising is on the table as a possible option. On the face of it, it appears to offer certain advantages. I therefore support further work ahead of any more formal commitments. Sadly, franchising it is not a silver bullet some would have us believe, nor is it public ownership. Franchising campaigners often refer to other Combined Authorities like Greater Manchester, which years ago started the long process of introducing franchising. I am watching closely the progress of my good friend and colleague Andy Burnham on this issue. However there are big differences, for example - and crucially - Manchester also has a tram system which can be used to cross-subsidise costs. We do not have this very important advantage having allowed ourselves to miss out on a new tram system due to arguments between two of our local councils which saw us lose this funding (it instead went to Nottingham which, to its credit, now has a fantastic system). Any losses made on a West of England franchised system of course would become the liability of us locally, so we need to tread carefully as we decide the very best way forward for our bus system.

33. Question 33 received from Suzanne Audrey

Agenda item 9, Investment fund programme

Background. The report includes reference to the Arena Infrastructure Package of almost £11m. The YTL arena team has announced an increase in capacity since planning permission was granted from 17,000 to 19,000.

Question. What changes are required to the YTL arena infrastructure package and transport plan as a result of the substantial increase in the capacity of the arena that has been announced by YTL?

Metro Mayor's response

This issue is subject to planning consent. South Gloucestershire Council is the authority responsible for the project.

34. Question 34 received from Suzanne Audrey

Question 2. Agenda item 12, Transformation Programme & Regional Strategy

Background. Grant Thornton recommended: The Mayor and members of the West of England Combined Authority represented by the Council Leaders, must commit to improving their working relationship and demonstrate that significant progress has been made within a reasonable timeframe.

The draft minutes of the meeting of 2 May 2023 indicate: The West of England Combined Authority Mayor opened the meeting reconvened from Friday 28 April, which had been rescheduled to the 2 May 2023 upon being determined to be inquorate. The Mayor was advised that the meeting was again inquorate. The three Unitary Authorities having advised that none of the three Unitary Authorities were able to send either their nominated representative or one of the two nominated substitutes appointed by each authority.

It seems worrying that all three Unitary Authorities were unable to send either their nominated representative or one of the two nominated substitutes to either of these meetings. It would help if those who are invited or expected to attend meetings gave some indication as to why they are unable to attend.

Question 1. Please provide further information about the reasons why none of the three Unitary Authorities were able to send either their nominated representative or one of the two nominated substitutes to the meetings with the Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority on 28 April and 2 May 2023.

Metro Mayor's response:

The Unitary Authority leaders will need to provide their own answers for not attending or sending representatives to the 28 April and 2 May meetings.

35. Question 35 received from David W Cox

1. Our normal bus, the 768 has been cancelled. We currently have no replacement bus. For this coming July and August, when we have relatives visiting from abroad, will the Westlink service have adequate capacity to take us (3 adults and our 6 grandsons with luggage and a pushchair) for our usual summer sightseeing trips? 2.If the answer to my first question is no, then when will the 768 service be reinstated?

Metro Mayor's response:

The vehicles operating the WESTlink service are 16 seat buses that have sufficient capacity to accommodate your passengers and luggage, as well as pushchairs and wheelchairs. I hope that the service will enable you to enjoy your family time in the summer.

36. Question 36 Cllr Heather Mack, Bristol City Council

Item 11: Transport schemes (M32 Sustainable Transport Corridor and Hub)

What is the expected cost and justification for using sustainable transport funding for building a new junction on the M32 like the one at Stoke Lane?

Metro Mayor's response:

The cost for the new junction is being determined now, as part of the Outline Business Case stage, aligned to National Highways safety and design requirements.

Providing access points to sustainable transport is a core element of moving people from their personal transport – cars - onto sustainable travel options.

Traffic modelling shows that use of existing junctions on the M32 (for example junction 1) would cause traffic stacking. That would impact the M32 and M4 and overload the existing junctions.

37. Question 37 received from Cllr Heather Mack, Bristol City Council

What is the last possible date for when repairs need to be made to the Eastville Viaduct?

Metro Mayor's response:

National Highways have not yet published a schedule for repairs to the Eastville Viaduct. They are waiting for the outcome of a funding decision from the Department for Transport.

38. Question 38 received from Cllr David Wilcox, Bristol City Council

Item 11: Transport schemes: (Active Travel Fund tranche 4)

According to the ATF4 funding principles (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-complete-the-active-travel-fund-4-proforma/guidance-note-for-local-authorities-to-support-completion-of-the-active-travel-fund-4-proforma?cmdf=active+travel+tranche+4+invite+letter>):

“All schemes must comply with Manual for streets, Cycle infrastructure design (LTN 1/20) and the DfT's inclusive mobility guidance. Authorities will be required to show that their designs consider a range of users. For example, we expect to see schemes which enable women to feel safer and more confident in using active travel modes.”

The criteria in section 2.3.2 is missing these key principles.

Will you ensure these principles are embedded in WECA's work on active travel going forwards and include them in future criteria in reports such as this one?

Metro Mayor's response:

Section 2.3.2 refers to one of the key criteria as “Design quality and safety as defined by the ATE design tools”. This includes all relevant technical guidance such as LTN 1/20 and Manual For Streets, and was an explicit consideration in the ATF4 bid prioritisation.

Compliance to this guidance, as well as the general duty to provide safe highway layouts, is a key requirement and is therefore included in project assurance for all so called “active travel” schemes funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority.

39. Question 39 received from Cllr David Wilcox, Bristol City Council

Will WECA commit to delivering all bike hangars without a concrete plinth?

Metro Mayor's response:

I am committed to funding and promoting the delivery of bike hangars in a way that delivers the best value for public money and delivers benefits as soon as possible.

My officers are in discussion with the three Unitary Authorities over how this can be best achieved. I wholeheartedly agree that insistence on concrete plinths should be avoided - as is the case in other parts of the country.

However, the West of England Combined Authority is not the highway authority for on-street delivery. This is the remit of the Unitary Authorities so all final site specification is ultimately decided by them.

40. Question 40 received from Cllr Emma Edwards, Bristol City Council

item 11 – Transport schemes -_(EV Charging)

What support is there for EV charging from homes where no driveway is available and running cables across the pavement is a hazard?

Metro Mayor's response:

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority has recently submitted an Expression of Interest to the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (LEVI), which seeks to secure funding to deliver further Electric Vehicle Charging On street for those who don't have off-street parking.

It is important that the siting of EV charging points needs to be done with proper consideration for the needs of everyone in the community.

Placing EV charging points is the responsibility of the local councils. My overriding concern is that councils do not slow down the process of installing them.

41. Question 41 received from Cllr Emma Edwards, Bristol City Council

item 11 – Transport schemes -_(EV Charging)

Where on-street charging is proposed, will the authority make a commitment to use only on-road charging infrastructure or infrastructure that is already there, such as lampposts (rather than taking more pavement space away from pedestrians)?

Metro Mayor's response:

Placing EV charging points is the responsibility of the local councils. My overriding concern is that councils do not slow down the process of installing them.

42. Question 42 received from Cllr Ed Plowden, Bristol City Council

Regarding BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) funding – with the recent announcement by the DfT which changes the scope of what this funding can be used for, when will WECA be deciding and publishing how it will use this funding to support buses in the West of England?

Metro Mayor's response:

Clarification is being sought from government of the details, conditions and process around any change of scope for the BSIP funding. At the same time, officers are reviewing the overall progress of the BSIP implementation programme to understand what opportunity might exist to take advantage of this new flexibility. In the meantime, I have contacted local council leaders.

43. Question 43 received from Cllr Ed Plowden, Bristol City Council

(Cycling and Walking Scheme Delivery)

What are the timescales and consultation process for reworking the WCIP?

Metro Mayor's response:

The West of England MCA is working towards starting the public engagement on the Walking and Cycling Investment Plan in late summer. Options are being considered on the different ways of engaging to ensure that a wide range of people have their voices heard.

44. Question 44 received from Cllr Sam Ross , Bath & NE Somerset Council

With funding for public transport declining, we need to consider alternative ways to connect rural communities so that people can continue to access vital services such as healthcare, education and employment, as well as maintain social connections without the need to own/drive a car.

While reliable, timetabled public transport in these areas should still be a goal for both WECA and local authorities to work together to achieve, complimentary strategies are desperately required to provide long-term permanent alternatives that don't fall foul of service funding cuts.

To provide these permanent connections between communities while also meeting the goal of increasing active travel in rural areas, is there any consideration being given to funding for new pavements along busy roads to join villages through a network of accessible and safe public footways?

Metro Mayor's response:

Pavements and footways are the responsibility of local councils, as they are the Highways Authority.

45. Question 45 received from Emma Cameron

I visit my parents in Nailwell with my young family each summer and don't have a car. I was planning on using the 768 bus to attend work meetings and visit other family but understand the 768 has been cancelled. I do not have a mobile phone that works in the UK. Previously my son also used to catch the 768 from Bath to visit his grandparents in the summer. He does not have a mobile phone. I understand Westlink requires a phone. Is there a replacement bus service between Bath and Nailwell?

Metro Mayor's response:

Buses are a complicated funding jigsaw. There are three key types of bus services:

1. Commercial services - These are run by a private operator to make a profit.
2. Council-supported services - These are services that don't make a profit but where there is a social need. They are operated by the West of England Combined Authority through contracts with local bus companies but, according to the rules, they can't compete with commercial services. They are paid for by money raised by local councils through council tax which is passed onto the West of England Combined Authority via an annual Transport Levy. Earlier this year local councils decided on a real-term cut to such expenditure at a time

when bus costs for fuel and staff are going up. We are still seeing the consequences of this feeding through with several bus services having been cut.

I did not have a vote on how much money each council contributes and as Metro Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority I do not have any tax raising powers.

3. Finally there is the Bus Service Improvement Plan money where I secured the second highest amount of government funding in the country. This money also has strings attached. It needs to be for new and innovative services and until very recently specifically could not be spent on maintaining council-supported services. Very recently government changed the rules for later in the year - for some funding, by request, but again with caveats such as working to ensure services become commercial. Clarification is being sought from government of the details, conditions and process around any change of scope for the BSIP funding. At the same time, officers are reviewing the overall progress of the BSIP implementation programme to understand what opportunity might exist to take advantage of this new flexibility. In the meantime, I have contacted local council leaders.

WESTlink is can be reached via the internet at travelwest.info/westlink or by calling 0117 457 8561 or via the app.

46. Question 46 Received from Joanna Booth

How is £2.56m a good use of public money for creating a Strategic Outline Case for Western Harbour and producing a masterplan concept report and highway alignment feasibility assessment report by March 2025? Note that an initial report for the Plimsoll Bridge, was done a few years and estimated costs at £27m.

Metro Mayor's response:

The Strategic Outline Case (SOC) has been produced by Bristol City Council, including confirmation from their S151 officer that they are responsible and accountable for ensuring value for money in the delivery of the project. It should be noted that this is only development funding and a further business cases(s) would be required to unlock additional funding for delivery. This follows the standard HM Treasury Green Book process and will include a test of value for money for the works themselves using appropriate methodologies. The SOC has been reviewed by officers at the West of England Combined Authority who say the costs appear reasonable for the work being undertaken.

47. Question 47 received from Joanna Booth

Can you provide a list of the work that is expected to be produced with £2.56m? (see Q. 46)

Metro Mayor's response:

A full list of expected works is set out within the Western Harbour Strategic Outline Case, which is published on the Combined Authority's website.

The feasibility assessment of local road network changes informs the extent of land available for redevelopment.

The Masterplan will bring the Western Harbour vision to life by setting out in detail where the new homes, jobs and green/blue, physical, social and community infrastructure that Bristol needs could go, and how the existing community, natural and heritage assets can be best served and celebrated. It will consider how the scheme could be delivered and funded.

The Masterplan and supporting evidence will enable phased development and regeneration in the area to progress through the planning system.

The development of the Masterplan will inform inputs to the Bristol Local Plan Review, area-specific planning documents and, in the longer term, the delivery of essential new homes, jobs and infrastructure for the region.

Activities planned to deliver the above will include:

- Integrated Baseline Assessment Report
- Scenario Approach and Feasibility Report
- Design Principles Report
- Concept Structure Diagram
- Design Optioneering