

# COMMENTS TO THE COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE FROM THE LEP CHAIR ON BEHALF OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

FRIDAY 26 JANUARY

## COMMITTEE:

### **Bristol Temple Quarter Regeneration Programme**

- We are pleased to see further plans to support the progression of the Temple Quarter Regeneration Programme, particularly in the context of the ambitious plans to bring forward economic development activity to create the infrastructure to deliver thousands of new jobs, and 10,000 new homes across the area and a boost of billions of pounds each year to the West of England economy.
- Finalising arrangements for a Joint Delivery Vehicle, which would consolidate the partnership working between Bristol City Council, Network Rail, Homes England, and the West of England Combined Authority to drive forward the comprehensive regeneration of the area, can create a mechanism in which assets and resources can be deployed in an equitable way towards the ambitious goals, helping to deliver the new homes, jobs and opportunities that the region needs.
- It is pleasing to see the progress that has been made since the last report, and in particular we are pleased to see that further works are now taking place at Bristol Temple Meads station to facilitate the construction of the new Eastern Entrance, alongside the significant works that the University of Bristol are undertaking to create their new Enterprise Campus.

### **Investment Fund Programme**

- I welcome the Culture West project which brings a blend of Combined Authority, Arts Council, and match funding from partners, to deliver a package of measures to improve access to arts and culture. This will involve upskilling in the creative sector to enable access to wider work opportunities in the health, education, and environment settings. The plan to engage young people through a Cultural Education Hub is also very positive, to inspire young people to pursue a future career in the creative sector.
- I note there are a number of awards related to the CRSTS programme. The Somer Valley Links project will provide key public transport and active travel improvements on the corridors between the Somer Valley and Bristol and Bath. I also support the proposal to award funding to develop the CRSTS2 business case, so we are well placed to take advantage of this future additional Government funding expected to be over £700m.

### **Delivery Assurance**

- I note there are a number of schemes in the funding programmes that report delay. I welcome the continuing actions to seek to address challenges with delivery, but it appears there is still more to do particularly if we are to maximise the opportunity that the current CRSTS programme and the Investment Fund bring.

### **Transformation Programme**

- I am pleased to see such positive progress in the Transformation Programme and welcome conversations to help redefine the role of a Business Board to create a powerful voice of business and bring a strategic perspective to addressing the challenges our region faces.
- The LEP Board is keen to continue involvement in the Regional Strategy refresh and we look forward to further engagement. This refresh is key to the direction of the Combined Authority and future devolution deals to ensure we are a place where Government can invest.

## **Transport Infrastructure Projects**

- As I have stated before transport is a long-standing issue for the LEP and business more broadly and progressing key transport projects is vital to encourage growth and ensure our region meets its full economic potential.
- We need to consider changes to our region's transport network, to deliver an enhanced public transport network that increases connectivity and provides real alternatives to using the car, which is needed for a sustainable future.
- The transport paper discusses a variety of projects, but with a focus on rail, which remains a key feature of our regional transport strategy. Further development of a pipeline of rail projects is fundamental so we build on the region's recent successes in rail delivery and are ready to take advantage of future funding opportunities, knowing which projects will contribute most to achieving our objectives. We also need to decarbonise the transport network, and electrification of our region's rail infrastructure is an essential part of that. We must also take advantage of external funding opportunities to improve the bus fleet.
- Whilst encouraging people to use more sustainable ways to travel must be the priority, for those journeys that do need to be taken by car, they should use electric vehicles and we need to make sure our residents and businesses have access to the charging infrastructure they need to make that switch. This will mean focussing public investment where the private sector is less likely to deliver.
- We have been disappointed that Future 4 West proposals have not been brought back to this committee, and it is clear that sustaining our long terms plans remains vital for the economic performance of the region as well as contributing to our journey to Net Zero.

## **Mayoral and Combined Authority Budget 2024/25 & Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

- Over the last 12 months, the Combined Authority has delivered across the strategic priorities the Committee previously set - working together across the partnership and I was pleased to see just how much has been achieved in the report. It is important that we also recognise that the West of England Combined Authority is continuing to change and is on a journey therefore the needs to adapt and have the resources in place to ensure that it has the skills and capacity to deliver the significant programme of work ahead for the benefits of the economy, and ultimately the residents and businesses of the region.
  - On the Capital Strategy - I note the information presented in the detailed capital budget for 2024/25, and indicative budget up to 2027/28 which again demonstrates the significant capital growth in funding within the Combined Authority has obtained and is required to deliver. The LEP Board is supportive and keen to increase its engagement and 'step change' positively the Combined Authority's reputation with government, business, and residents.
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