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To West of England Joint Transport Consultation, c/o South Gloucestershire Council, PO
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Railfuture response to West of England Joint Transport Study

Each numbered group of paragraphs corresponds with the number reference for Possible
Transport Solutions in the statement of Objectives and Current Issues.

1. Strengthen and enhance public transport corridors.

Good interchange between modes is essential for the creation of seamless journeys which offer an attractive alternative to car travel. Examples of best practice include Bath Spa and Bristol Parkway, where the bus station (Bath) or bus stops (Parkway) are very close to the railway station entrances. At the other end of the scale is Yatton, which despite being a fairly well appointed station with a waiting room and café, no longer has any bus links to Clevedon, only 3 ½ miles away. The station nameboards proclaim “Yatton for Clevedon” but only people with local knowledge or who buy the GWR Guide to Services will be aware that the interchange station is now Nailsea & Backwell, which has minimal shelter.

We welcome First West of England’s diversion of a bus route to serve Avonmouth station which according to its Managing Director has resulted in more passengers. There is a strong case for buses to call at Filton Abbey Wood station, which is served by inter-regional (eg Cardiff- Portsmouth) as well as local trains. If this is not acceptable to bus operators, there should at least be improved signage to bus stops in Filton Avenue.

Onward Travel posters at rail stations need to be highly visible and updated regularly. Updating is best done locally by train and bus operators rather than by a remote agency. Bristol Temple Meads and Parkway stations have electronic screens with live information on imminent bus departures. Such screens should be installed at the more important stations in the WEP area such as Bath Spa, Filton Abbey Wood and Weston-super-Mare.

The time and cost required to build new rail infrastructure is not insuperable. Clearance work for quadrupling the line through Filton Bank has begun, only a few years after the scheme was first promoted by WEP. Other major conurbations in Britain are continuing to expand their rail networks; closer to home, Devon County Council has funded stations at Newcourt and Cranbrook, in or near Exeter and which both opened in 2015.

2. Extended MetroBus network

We do not regard this as a priority because buses have been less successful than rail in attracting passengers from cars. We believe it would be better to improve bus services on ordinary roads by means of bus priorities and interchange with rail. In Cambridgeshire, where the UK's longest guided busway opened in 2011, two years late and 60 % over budget, the County Council is planning only a minor extension of the guideway to link it to a proposed railway station at Cambridge Science Park. It is now progressing improvements to the county's rail system including reopening of the Wisbech line.

3. Extend MetroWest

MetroWest needs to extend into Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. This is because many people now commute greater distances than was the case when smaller stations were closed in the 1960s. For the same reason, a "one size fits all" local service calling at every station on main lines is less appropriate, especially for sizeable towns such as Bridgwater, Gloucester and Yeovil which have few fast trains into Bristol. Network Rail's 2013 Regional Market Study concluded that commuters wanted their train journeys into regional cities to take no more than one hour. We believe there is scope to develop hierarchies of main line services (fast, semi-fast and all stations) by means of network enhancements, such as Filton Bank four tracking, and through the cascade of rolling stock from electrification in the Thames Valley.

The faster acceleration of electric trains offers an opportunity to introduce semi-fast services between Bristol and Swindon. A service via Bath could call at Corsham, while another via Parkway could serve reopened stations at Coalpit Heath, Chipping Sodbury and Hullavington. The last mentioned station would serve the nearby town of Malmesbury and new housing proposed on the former RAF base.

4. MetroWest Plus

Tram trains should be considered once the forthcoming Sheffield-Rotherham experiment has been evaluated. They could provide a useful way of extending rail services into populous corridors where rail infrastructure either does not exist or has been partly destroyed, eg Bristol-Brislington-Radstock. Such services might use a combination of usable rail formations and street running. Road schemes such as the Callington Road Link which would block remaining sections of trackbed (in this case on the former Bristol-Radstock line) should be halted until there has been a proper investigation of re-use for light rail.

5. Walking and Cycling

Safe walking and cycling routes should be encouraged, especially to give access to rail stations, as the Henbury Station Consultation appears to suggest. Illegal pavement cycling should be discouraged because of the danger to pedestrians.

6, 7 and 8. Better Connectivity, Network Pinch Points and Strategic Corridors.

There is no mention of railways or public transport in these sections. We would counsel against major expenditure to accommodate car-based transport because of the present high levels of air pollution, particularly in Bath and Bristol which both have Air Quality Management Areas. Action on Strategic Corridors does need to include development of rail including electrification of suburban services. Encouraging more car travel is likely to

increase ill health from sedentary lifestyles, whereas nearly all public transport journeys involve some degree of walking. Better health ought to be viewed as a benefit of spending money on rail and bus.

9. Working Better Together

The uncertainty as to when a station at Ashton Gate might open and the apparent lack of progress in bus/rail connectivity at Filton Abbey Wood both suggest that transport planning has not always been well coordinated between the four authorities of the WEP. We support suggestions for one transport office to plan and progress all local rail and bus schemes in the Greater Bristol area and that it should work closely with neighbouring counties.

10. Local Sustainable Transport Fund

Wiltshire Council made a successful bid for £4.25m of LSTF funding in 2012 to provide an enhanced TransWilts (Swindon- Westbury) train service for three years from December 2013. According to GWR, passenger journeys in Year 1 were 183,000, four times the official forecast. LSTF could be the key to reopening stations such as Corsham and Saltford which are not specified in MetroWest Phase 1 or 2.

11. Regional Connectivity.

Further main line electrification such as from Bristol to Birmingham and Plymouth would relieve pressure on motorways and be more sustainable, ie less dependent on imported fuel, than would trunk road improvements.

12. Freight

Rail freight is not mentioned, even though the reopening of Bristol Freightliner depot is one of its successes in recent years. A new siding is under construction at the former ICI Seabank site on the Severn Beach line to serve an energy from waste facility. Suburban electrification including the Henbury and Portishead lines would benefit both passenger and freight services. Existing terminals should be safeguarded even if not currently active, eg Bath Westmoreland sidings. The mothballed branch line to Tytherington may be able to carry construction materials to a possible new power station at Oldbury.

13. Travel demand management

Fears about public acceptance of measures to nudge motorists out of their cars may be exaggerated. Nottingham City Council has used workplace parking levies in the city centre to help fund recent extensions to the tram system. A recent trend away from shopping at large out-of-town supermarkets would suggest that many people are driving less. Many younger people cannot afford cars or motor insurance but find trains congenial for using hand held devices. The massive growth in usage of rail in the WEP area* in the past 15-20 years is itself evidence of reduced dependency on cars.

- eg the 12 stations in Bristol City registered an increase from 4.1 m recorded journeys in 1997/98 to 11m in 2013/14 according to the Office of Rail & Road.

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