

West of England Local Economic Partnership  
Engine Shed  
Station Approach  
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18 December 2016

Dear James

### **Joint Spatial Plan Consultation**

Please find attached Railfuture response to the Joint Spatial Plan Consultation. I have used the Questions in the "Towards the Emerging Spatial Strategy Document" as headings for the response. Should anything require clarification, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

***Nigel Bray***

Railfuture  
Secretary, Severnside Branch

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## Railfuture response to West of England Joint Spatial Plan Consultation

### Our response

Railfuture's comments are listed below in answer to Consultation Questions 3 to 6 of the Towards the Emerging Spatial Strategy Document. We have not offered a view on Questions 1 and 2 which are concerned with housing needs.

### **Question 3 Does the proposed strategy make adequate provision to address the economic and employment needs of the West of England?**

1. We support the intention in paragraph 40 (page 14) to identify strategic locations where high profile public transport will assist in developing sustainable growth. However, we are concerned that some of the proposed locations are more likely to generate substantial additional car commuting. This is because new housing in villages and the outer suburbs of urban areas tends to attract people accustomed to a high level of car use.
2. The proposed garden village at Buckover and the M5-A38 development east of Weston-super-Mare are some distance from a railway station but their proximity to major roads would be a magnet to car commuting. In the case of the M5-A38 location, travel to Bristol, Bath or South Gloucestershire by rail would require a journey in the wrong direction to reach a station. Faster trains and higher parking charges, including workplace parking levies, might be mitigating factors.
3. As a great deal of productivity is known to be lost through road congestion, it follows that expansion of rail services would almost certainly increase economic output because trains are the most suitable mode for people to work while in transit. Provided there is adequate capacity on the trains and services are reliable, rail commuters are more likely to arrive at work relaxed than are those stuck in traffic jams.

### **Question 4 Does the Preferred Spatial Strategy and the locations identified meet the plan's strategic priorities and vision?**

4. We support in principle the measures to encourage modal shift across the plan area but consider that the potential role of rail has been understated. In so far as rail is part of a package of wider transport measures, we agree that improvements to capacity, access to stations and interchanges are needed. The impressive growth in rail use over the past 15-20 years makes a strong case not only for enhancing existing lines and stations but for opening new ones, using the £1bn budgeted for Rail and the £2.5bn for Light Rapid Transport in the Transport Vision Summary Document .
5. Some of the Likely Transport Mitigations specified in Table 1 (pages 17-22 of the document) make no mention of rail even where there are stations already open or proposed in or near the areas concerned. North and East Keynsham is a case in point. Keynsham station and its train services have been improved in recent years, which is reflected in a growth in recorded journeys from 102,000 in 1997/98 to 424,000 in 2015/16 (ORR Station Usage figures).
6. The mitigations discussed for Coalpit Heath refer to improvements planned for Yate station. This would, however, involve travelling by road to Yate in the wrong direction to start a rail journey to Bristol or Bath. Given the scale of rail passenger growth in South Gloucestershire (from 1.5m recorded journeys in 1997/98 to 3.8m in 2015/16 according to

ORR), there is a case for reopening Coalpit Heath station in a future phase of MetroWest, served by trains to Yate and / or an electrified local service to Swindon via Bristol Parkway.

7. This said, we welcome the recognition of the usefulness of stations at Nailsea & Backwell, Weston-super-Mare and Charfield to new housing planned in those areas.

**Question 5 Are there any reasons why the strategy or identified locations could not be delivered?**

8. Traditionally, improvements to public transport have very often not materialised until years after housing or industrial developments have taken place. We appreciate that the plan does not regard bus or train services as an afterthought but the very slow Development Consent Order and GRIP processes are an obstacle to the rapid delivery of rail schemes in particular. There is a need for Central Government to review these planning procedures so that public transport projects can be delivered at least as quickly as road building.

9. Cranbrook, Devon, a new Town whose railway station opened in 2015, is one of the best examples of rail improvements closely following the building of the town, although work on the station was delayed by questions of land ownership.

**Question 6 Is the Preferred Spatial Strategy the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives?**

10. The Preferred Spatial Strategy is reasonably similar to the Transport focused approach shown in Map 3 of the document, except for the developments now proposed at Buckover and the M5-A38 corridor.

11. Some of the locations rejected and listed in Table 2 would seem to be relatively easy to serve by public transport. Wickwar could be considered for development because of its proximity to the existing station at Yate and the proposed one at Charfield. Wickwar is closer to either of these stations than is, for instance, Dursley to Cam & Dursley station, so it would not seem inevitable that any development there would have to be car-based.

12. The comments regarding Portishead, Easton-in-Gordano and Pill make great play of capacity problems at Junction 19 of the M5. The strategy needs to follow the Transport Vision in trying to move away from car dependency and to make the most of new train services like the Portishead line.

13. The comments about the Somer Valley are relevant. Whilst Railfuture supports the North Somerset Railway's campaign to reopen the Radstock- Frome line, we would not wish the area to become a dormitory for commuters to Bath.