

West of England Joint Transport Executive Committee

11th September 2013

Views of Joint Scrutiny Committee

Purpose

1. To inform members of the views of the West of England Joint Scrutiny Committee (JSC) following a meeting held on Friday 6th September 2013

Background

2. The JSC comprises of three members that have been nominated by each of the four participating Authorities (Bristol City Council, Bath & NE Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset) to meet jointly as the West of England Joint Scrutiny Committee. It conducts an overview and scrutiny function on their behalf of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
3. The relevant terms of reference are set out below:
 - Scrutinise any relevant proposals from the Joint Transport Executive Committee, Planning Housing and Communities Board and the Stakeholder Group in relation to the activities outlined in their terms of reference
 - Scrutinise other relevant proposals related to public funding and resources made from the Local Enterprise Partnership Board and the Skills Sub-Group
 - Review actions taken and decisions made by these bodies related to public funding and resources
 - Make reports or recommendations to these bodies, as appropriate and/or the constituent authorities' respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees or equivalent
 - Scrutinise the activities of private sector companies, recognising that the private sector is not under the same obligation to appear in public or have regard to recommendations made by a Scrutiny committee in the same way that public service providers are required to do so.
4. The Joint Scrutiny Committee will now have a responsibility for scrutinising the West of England Local Transport Body Board.
5. The JSC were sent copies of the agenda and reports for this meeting on Tuesday 3rd September 2013. James White gave a presentation to JSC which covered key issues for JTEC.

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6. The JSC received representations during the public forum on the following:
 - The Henbury Loop with a request for the provision of one passenger train per day on the Henbury line as soon as possible:
 - James White responded by explaining that Network Rail had confirmed that the line was currently designated for freight use only. Changes to the signalling system to allow for the running of passenger trains would be required. Whilst passenger trains had been run in the past, special arrangements needed to be made to enable this to happen. It was therefore not possible to run passenger trains at this particular time.

- JSC members suggested that a representative be invited from Network Rail to the next meeting. It was felt that the reasons offered by Network Rail were not acceptable and that it was the Joint Scrutiny Committee's view that the operating standards should be altered to enable passenger use of the Henbury line.
 - A representative of Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways commented on the answers that had been given in response to the questions she had submitted commenting on the need for a station at Horfield as well as one at Ashley Down expressing disappointment that Network Rail had identified the former as point for a crossover as part of the proposed four tracking.
 - James White explained that four tracking at Filton Bank was considered to be of national importance but Network Rail had identified Horfield as the site for the required crossover. However the re-opening of a station at Ashley Down could happen as early as 2016/17 as a result of the four tracking project.
 - Councillors expressed disappointment as they felt there was capacity for both stations and a different location should be found for the crossover. The current proposal was not acceptable.
 - The Chair summarised the discussion by saying that it was clear that the Joint Scrutiny Committee had a strong view on both the Henbury line and the siting of the cross over and requested that this be communicated to the Joint Transport Executive Committee.
7. James White gave a presentation to JSC which covered key issues for JTEC including an update on Major Schemes, MetroBus, the JLTP3 progress report and MetroWest.
8. Members responded by commenting on:
- About the drop in bus patronage figures and asked if any analysis been carried out to establish the reasons.
 - James White said that this had yet to be done on a local basis but nationally it was thought that the poor weather over the previous 12 months and the Olympics had been a factor. Concessionary travel was down and there had been a 6% rise in cycling. Nationally, payments of the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) had also dropped by 20% with fewer services running but this had less of an impact in the West of England area
 - On Horfield Station, it was noted that it was still shown on the map and referred to the earlier discussion on Horfield Station asking if this had now been removed from the overall MetroWest plan.
 - James White said that this would have to be a formal decision to delete the station proposal.
 - It was noted that the annual cost of running an individual train unit was £750k and it was asked if the number of stops would have any impact on this.
 - James White said that the number of stops did not determine the overall running costs although fuel consumption would increase with the additional braking and accelerating generated by more stops.

- The improvement in air quality was noted but members asked if the fact that the number of sites at which this was measured had been reduced within Bristol might have had an impact on this.
 - James White said that he would check to see if this was the case.
- Members commented on the report for Agenda Item 8, paragraph 13 for the JTEC meeting regarding the funding of the MetroBus schemes which was showing a possible increase in cost of £3.5million, and wanted to know if the authorities were locked into the figures shown in the table.
 - Barbara Davies explained that Department for Transport (DfT) had requested the projections and the information had been provided by the three authorities involved in the project. Whilst it wasn't entirely clear what would happen, it was unlikely that the DfT would alter their position in terms of the profile, and slippage in spend would need to be found through the Local Growth Fund.
- Great disappointment was expressed that the Smart Card Project hadn't yet come to fruition and it was asked if the time had come to abandon it.
 - Barbara Davies responded by explaining that the project had been a huge political aspiration on the part of the four authorities. It was very complex and had required the co-operation and participation of bus operators in the area. A pilot had recently been launched on the Bath Park and Ride, First Bus were pleased with progress and had reported a strong take up by passengers.
 - Chris Sane (South Gloucestershire Council) explained that it had not been about just producing one smart card but several different projects including the setting up of a "back office" which had been achieved. However it was recognised that what was being delivered was now different to what had been originally been envisaged.
- Members said that the rate of technological change may explain some caution on the part of operators to invest in something that might be obsolete in a short period of time. Mobile phone technology was developing at a rapid rate and 'near field communication' was about to be implemented on the London Underground.
- Members requested that a report be made to the Joint Scrutiny Committee at the next meeting to explain the current situation.
- The Chair sought an assurance that there was sufficient resource to provide a report.
- It was agreed that the West of England office would co-ordinate the completion of the report.
- Members then commented on the MetroWest project, the Henbury Loop and the proposed station at the Portway Park & Ride.
 - James White said that the Henbury line was in Phase Two because when priorities had been established for Phase One prominence had been given to Portishead, four tracking at Filton Bank and a half hourly service across the area agreed by JTEC and consulted on at the stake holder rail conference held in 2011. Initial work was underway to establish how best this could be achieved and to establish whether a Henbury spur or loop was

- the most appropriate solution. A sound business case would be required, with a BCR of not less than 2 and the process set out to establish new services had to be followed.
- On Portway Park & Ride a bid to the New Stations Fund had been made but unfortunately this had not been successful. DfT and Network Rail have indicated that the project would need to be at GRIP Stage Three in order to have a further bid succeed. A new project board was being established as part of MetroWest and this could be taken forward via this .
- Members felt that Bristol City Council had funding earmarked for the Portway Park & Ride.
 - James White said that he would check this with officers.
 - Members asked about the membership of the Local Transport Body Board.
 - Barbara Davies explained that it comprised of the four members of JTEC and two representatives of the LEP, Robert Sinclair and Paul Wilson.
 - Members asked about the role of officers as decision makers in transport projects reported to JTEC
 - Barbara Davies explained that officers took an active role in terms of taking projects forward but decisions were made by JTEC members.
 - Members commented on the South Bristol Link and felt it would be a lost opportunity not to create a transport hub at the junction of the A369 and A370.

Recommendation

9. That members note the views of the West of England Joint Scrutiny Committee

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