

## Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body - April 2022 Board Meeting

### Agenda Item 3 - Public Participation

- Statements from members of the public in line with the Board's Public Participation Scheme, statements/questions and responses are provided below.
- A question was received from:
  - **Chris Nadin, on behalf of the A350 Community Group Operations committee**

#### Question –

The A350 between Warminster and Poole Dorset section – question to the board

The public engagement plan of the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body states,

“There is a desire to maximise engagement across the STB area”

This question is posed in support of the spirit of that pledge and against the relevant agenda item for the Strategic Transport Plan at your meeting of the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2022.

As the board will be aware the “Economic Connectivity Study” published in July 2019 identified the A350 between Warminster and Poole as a potential solution for the improvement of the road transport link between the Midlands and the Port of Poole. The report ranks the project as second in importance only to the M5 project in terms of total sequencing. The report concluded that improvements to the corridor will ensure that this north-south strategic route is fully upgraded so that the present-day long journey times and bottlenecks associated with the road having to pass through severely capacity constrained villages can be reduced with the benefits being much improved journey times and reliability. Clearly since these “villages” are some of the most environmentally protected categories in the country including AONB, SSI status and National Trust ownership such a conclusion has attracted some degree of local concern. Whilst Dorset Council, by way of public question, have previously confirmed their interest in such a scheme our local elected representatives have sought to provide re-assurance that the intentions stated in 2019 are no longer a viable concern. To this end:

In June 2021 Cllr Sherry Jespersen of Hill Forts Ward personally distributed leaflets to constituents which stated, “We do not know what Highways England will conclude but my personal view, supported by our MP and key people within Dorset Council, is that the A350 corridor is unlikely to emerge as the preferred route”

On the 21st June 2021 Cllr Jane Somper of Beacon ward stated, “I believe that the A350 looks increasingly unlikely to emerge as the preferred route option. To be clear, since being elected as Ward Member for Beacon Ward in 2019 I have sought to put the case against the A350 route”

On 3rd August 2021 Simon Hoare MP stated in a broadcast: “I have really urged the government at a time when we all know there is significant pressure on the public purse not to waste money on consulting upon or examining a proposal which we know just from experience and nothing has changed will see nothing delivered. “

However as recently as 10 weeks ago Highways England have written to confirm that the current A350 remains under active consideration as the main strategic north south route between the Midlands and Port of Poole for HGV and all other road traffic. This would therefore inform RIS3.

Please could you confirm whether you have received any indication by the representatives of Dorset Council on your board that they no longer support the section of the A350 identified as a potential route

**Answer –**

Dorset Council officers are working with National Highways to provide evidence for their M4 to Dorset South Coast study. All existing north/south A roads are required to be considered as part of the National Highways study to understand how the existing routes complement each other and to examine their relative constraints, potential opportunities and benefits. The study has not yet reached a point where individual routes should be prioritised.

- A question was received from:
  - **David Redgewell, South West Transport Network & Railfuture Severnside**

**Question –**

Question 1

What progress is being made on the Eelectrification of the Great Western Railway main line from Chippenham, Bath to Bristol Temple Meads then onwards to Bristol Parkway and Patchway.

Question 2

What progress is being made on the electrification of the line from Bristol Parkway to Gloucester, Cheltenham and Birmingham with new stations at Charfield and Stonehouse Bristol Road?

Question 3

What support is the South Western Transport Board and Western Gateway Transport Board giving to the upgrading of Bristol Temple Meads as a transport hub for buses and coaches ? This includes improvements to passenger facilities ie extra tracks between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street, including extra platforms, waiting rooms, shops, cafes and restaurants and works to Temple Quay as part of the Regional levelling up fund on the main line between Bristol Temple Meads, Exeter St David, Plymouth and Penzance.

Questions 4

What progress is being on the electrification of the following Bristol Metro West routes :-

Bristol Temple Meads to Portishead via Pill.

Bristol Temple Meads to Ashley Down.

Filton North and Henbury station on the loop line including electrification of railway line to Port of Bristol at Portbury Dock and Avonmouth Dock as part the Government and the Department for Transport plans to decarbonise the UK and English railway network

Questions 5

What progress is the Western Gateway Transport Board and the South West Transport Board making on the replacement of diesel trains with electric and hybrid trains in the region with Network

Rail Western and Wessex route, First Group MTR South West Railway and First Group Great Western Railway, Deutsche Bahn the German state railway company and Cross Country Trains ?

#### Question 5

What progress is being made by the Western Gateway Transport Board on the regional long distance bus and coach network study with National Express, Stagecoach Megabus & Falcon and Flixbus including investment in regional bus and coach stations such as Cheltenham Spa, Royal Wells coach and bus station and Arles Court Transport interchange, Salisbury coach station, Bristol bus and coach station (which is at capacity) and future coach interchanges facilities in Bristol city centre, Poole and Bournemouth bus and coach stations and Swindon Fleming Way as well including Exeter coach station in Byfield Street and Tower Street coach station in Taunton.

#### **ANSWER (NB Where relevant, questions have been grouped and an answer provided that responds to more than one question)**

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##### Questions 4

What progress is being on the electrification of the following Bristol Metro West routes :-

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**Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy published in September 2020, included proposals for electrification of the Bristol to Birmingham, Bristol to Exeter and the Severn Beach Lines as well as completing electrification between Chippenham, Bath Spa, Bristol Temple Meads and Bristol Parkway. For the Severn Beach Line there was the suggestion services could be operated using battery traction.**

**Coming out of the Network Strategy is the Western and Wales Regional Traction Decarbonisation Strategy, which is currently being developed by Network Rail, in conjunction with industry partners. This will support investment decisions targeted at future electrification. Timelines for implementing these are likely to be 10+ years.**

**Designs for the reopened Portishead and Henbury lines and for new stations at Ashley Down and Charfield will all incorporate provision for future electrification.**

**The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body's Rail Strategy whilst accepting that it will not be possible to electrify every line and / or replace every diesel train with a net-zero alternative, recognises electrification remains the best way to decarbonise the rail network. The Bristol to Exeter and Birmingham and Severn Beach Lines are all identified for electrification in the Rail Strategy. The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body will continue to work with the rail industry towards the goal of a decarbonised rail network.**

##### Question 3

What support is the South Western Transport Board and Western Gateway Transport Board giving to the upgrading of Bristol Temple Meads as a transport hub for buses and coaches? This includes improvements to passenger facilities ie extra tracks between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street, including extra platforms, waiting rooms, shops, cafes and restaurants and works to Temple Quay as part of the Regional levelling up fund on the main line between Bristol Temple Meads, Exeter St David, Plymouth and Penzance.

**The Western Gateway STB is working closely with Network Rail on taking forward the outputs from the Bristol to Birmingham and Exeter Strategic Corridor Studies. This includes schemes for Cheltenham Spa station bay platform, Gloucester station bay platform and four tracking between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street stations. For all of them the extra capacity these schemes provide are the first steps to enabling more frequent services on these corridors and the continued role of Bristol Temple Meads as a major transport hub.**

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**The Western Gateway STB has commissioned AECOM to produce a coach strategy for the region. This will provide the evidence base for and identify potential areas to focus future investment on. It will look at and make the case for infrastructure to support coach services (e.g. coach stops and stations, coach parking facilities and coach drivers' facilities). Alongside this the study will include the case for a strategic coach network with local bus feeder services, longer distance coach routes to support areas not served by rail and how coach travel can contribute to decarbonisation.**