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Response to WoE Joint Transport Study: Transport Vision – November/December 2016

The Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the WoE Joint Transport Vision. We respond to the consultation questions below, but start with some general comments.

Summary of our comments

We support much of the Vision, particularly the aim to switch to more sustainable transport modes. But we question the amount of road expenditure. The Vision now needs to move on to the next stage, with more detail and prioritisation.

We support in particular:

- the primary role of walking, cycling and public transport within the urban areas
- measures to promote mode change
- the need to reduce traffic coming into Bristol city centre, using a ring of Park & Rides
- the re-allocation of road space on radial routes, potentially facilitated by improvements to orbital highway capacity in certain locations.
- physical restrictions on traffic and/or financial restraint options

Level of ambition: The projected reduction in car use from 64% from 46% would look less impressive if expressed as a number of vehicles on the road, because of the significant increase in population over the period. This leads one to question whether the level of ambition for the move to sustainable modes is high enough.

We are asked whether increasing infrastructure expenditure to £7.5bn (£375m pa over 20 years) from the current £50m pa is too ambitious. There is insufficient information to answer this. Plainly there is a limit to how much public funding will be available, but this cannot be predicted. It is right to raise some of the money through user charging. Not enough is known on the business case for each infrastructure package. The best approach is to decide the order and priority of the different packages.

Mix of expenditure: There are two areas of the proposed £7.5bn that are worth examining in more detail:

- *expenditure on roads:* whilst we strongly support that 65% (£4.9bn of the £7.5bn) of the total proposed expenditure is to be spent on sustainable modes, that still leaves £2.6bn expenditure on roads. The JTS maps show just how many road improvements are

proposed, eg the A38 corridor, and numerous junction improvements. This will encourage car use. It is false to think that it is possible to solve congestion by building more roads. Given the high projected expenditure on transport infrastructure, it is right to challenge whether a different choice of JSP development locations could reduce the expenditure on roads that is needed.

- *LRT routes in Bristol*: the proposed East Bristol and Gloucester Road LRT routes are difficult to deliver because the roads are narrow, and may need tunnelling. This engineering challenge is bound to be costly, but may be necessary if there is to be a step-change in travel by sustainable modes.

Next steps: As a next stage, we now need to see more on the order and priority for investment, and what things need doing together to make an impact. We know that the ring of Park and Rides is a first priority, but that is all we know. We look forward to the Bristol Transport Plan (BTP) and City Centre Movement Strategy (CCMS), which will emerge in 2017.

Specific proposals

User charging or “financial restraint”: by user charging, we mean parking charges – particular a workplace levy (WPL) – or a congestion charge. We assume that the prime area for user charging is Bristol city centre, as it is the most congested.

We defer to expert evidence on this subject, but our views are as follows:

- we support user charging, both to raise funds and to influence behaviours.
- a WPL would be easier to implement; a congestion charge requires complex infrastructure and is likely to face greater popular resistance.
- user charging may have only a marginal impact on congestion if suppressed demand remains high, but it is a useful funding source, as has been demonstrated in Nottingham.
- user charging is not a panacea, and should be introduced as part of a package of measures, such as the sustainable modes proposals in the Transport Vision.

Physical restraint: a certain amount of physical restraint of private motor traffic in the city should be part of the mix. The flow of traffic *into* the city centre needs to be controlled so that traffic moves *within* the city centre. Traffic restraint is needed to free up roads for segregated bus and cycle routes.

The JTS data shows that car commuters form more than 60% of commuters to Bristol. Historically, motor car travel has never been cheaper than it is at present. Education programmes and appeals for voluntary modal change from the private car to public transport will only have a limited effect. The number of single occupant cars on roads with 2+ lanes support this gloomy view. For 100 years, schemes to reduce traffic congestion have been based on the principle of road and junction improvement. As the current situation proves, congestion always overtakes road improvements.

The logic is politically unattractive but undeniable. There must be a new approach if road congestion is to be reduced. Traffic planning must approach the problem from the opposite direction and reduce vehicle numbers. The history of the central London Congestion Charge

Area shows that the Scheme merely delayed traffic growth. Without the support from more radical measures the proposed road improvement schemes will only give temporary congestion relief.

Park & Rides: we support the proposed ring of Park and Rides on the edges of Bristol, as long as they are in locations that do not generate new traffic in the wrong places. Park and Ride sites have been in past transport plans, but have not been delivered. The history of co-operation on P&Rs by South Gloucestershire Council does not make us hopeful, but maybe the joint plan will provide the necessary commitment.

We also support the Park and Rides further out – at Yate, and on the A38 south of Thornbury.

A37 to A4 road link: we understand the rationale of this – to support development at Whitchurch and free up the A37 and A4 radial routes. This is likely to generate more car traffic round Bristol from the M4 (with new junction 18a) round the east and south of Bristol to the airport and the M5 (a bad thing), but it will reduce traffic going through Bristol (a good thing).

Rapid transit routes: we support the substantial expenditure on Light Rapid Transport/ Metrobus/rail, including extensions of existing Metrobus routes.

We do not feel qualified to comment on the desirability of LRT, but note the problems and cost/time over-runs incurred on similar past projects in other cities. We are unsure whether the catchment area for the proposed East Bristol route will justify the high costs of LRT. A single route can be expected to serve only a slice of the wide built-up area that is East Bristol. Bus transport can serve more destinations in a dispersed pattern of suburban homes and centres.

Deliverability of radial LRT routes: the choice of LRT over Metrobus seems to have been made purely on the basis of population density in the catchment area, not on deliverability. Maybe this is fair enough as both options will face the same difficulties in clearing an unimpeded rapid transit route. For instance, the proposed East Bristol LRT route is very important as public transport connectivity is currently poor in this direction, but the available roads are not wide enough, and we are concerned about the deliverability challenge. There is a similar challenge on Gloucester Road, which is also a strategic cycle route.

Rail: we support the proposed new/improved rail stations. Why is a station at Coalpit Heath not proposed, being a chosen location for new development ?

Walking and cycling: we are highly supportive of measures to increase active travel. There is a tendency to focus on big public transport projects, but smaller projects that deliver a shift to walking and cycling are also important. The JTS proposals for walking and cycling are non-specific, and we expect to see more detail for Bristol in the BTP and CCMS.

We would make the following points about investment in walking and cycling:

- whilst only 5% (£0.4bn out of £7.5bn) of the total proposed expenditure is to be spent on active travel modes, it is assumed that some of the money allocated to Rapid Transit corridors will be spent on cycling and walking infrastructure. It would be helpful to make this clear in the cost breakdown.
- walking is a significant part of most multi-modal journeys, so public transport investment should include improvements to walking routes leading to public transport nodes.
- the JTS covers only the larger projects, so walking and cycling is picked up only under projects for strategic corridors, but investment in walking and cycling is needed also in the wider urban network. A joined-up network of segregated cycle routes could have a big impact. Physical constraints on motor traffic in the city centre can also benefit walking and cycling, for instance pedestrianisation and filtered permeability for cyclists. The JTS document should refer to this and the funding should allow for this.
- a package of measures to support walking as a sustainable transport option could include improved crossing-points, reduced through-traffic, removing polluting vehicles, creating pocket parks, wider pavements, better signage, incorporating places to rest e.g. benches, good lighting and sight lines, and traffic calming.
- there should be appropriate segregation of walking and cycling routes.

“Smarter choices” and “new technology”: We support the JTS proposals for ‘smarter choices’ behaviour change measures, and “new technology”, but the proposals are currently vague and not separately costed. “New technology” should include easy bus ticketing.

Roads: there are proposals for 2 new motorway junctions, 3 motorway junction improvements, 14 non-motorway junction improvements, and 7 new roads, all without any explanatory rationale. When the general thrust is towards supporting sustainable travel, all these proposals need justifying. However, we support expenditure on “smart motorways”, which maximise the capacity of the existing network.

Joint Transport Study: Transport Vision

Q1 Is the level of ambition for the Transport Vision about right?

A1 We support the amount being spent on sustainable modes. The amount on LRT routes is high, but there may be no alternative if there is to be a step-change in travel by sustainable modes. We question the amount being spent on roads. Given the high projected expenditure on transport infrastructure, it is right to challenge whether a different choice of JSP development locations could reduce the expenditure needed.

Q2 Do you think we are proposing the right mix of public transport investment (bus, rapid transit, park and ride and train)?

A2 The vision includes an appropriate range of public transport solutions, but the appropriate solutions in particular situations will emerge from more detailed work. It is assumed that some of the money allocated to Rapid Transit corridors will be spent on cycling and walking infrastructure, and it would be helpful to make this clear in the cost breakdown. Walking is a significant part of most multi-modal journeys, so public transport investment should include improvements to walking routes leading to public transport nodes.

Q3 To what extent do you agree with the principle of diverting non-local traffic, including onto new roads, to accommodate public transport and cycling schemes?

A3 We agree, if it is done in conjunction with financial and other demand management measures.

Q4 To what extent do you agree with the concept of a light rail solution on some rapid transit corridors?

A4 We do not feel qualified to comment on the desirability of LRT, but note the problems and cost over-runs incurred on similar past projects in other cities.

Q5 To what extent do you agree with using financial incentives and financial demand management at a local level to raise funds to help pay for the transport vision?

A5 We think this is essential, both to raise funds and to influence behaviours.

Q6 What kind of schemes would be most appropriate to deliver an upgrade to sustainable travel between the East Fringe and Bristol city centre?

A6 We do not have sufficient information to comment.

Q7 We'd like to know how much you agree with the various elements of the package?

A7

Marketing and education to change travel behaviour					5
Area packages of improvements for pedestrians, cyclists and buses					5
Strategic Cycle Routes - new or upgraded routes					5
Park & Ride - new or expanded sites					5
Bus network improvements					5
Expansion of the MetroBus network					5
Light Rail routes					5
Rail improvements – improvements to existing services and facilities					5
New railway stations					5
Road improvements, including junction improvements and addressing bottlenecks		2			
New road connections			3		
Freight management including consolidation centres					5

Q8 Are there any other schemes you would like to see in the package?

A8 The vision could include other means of sharing transport: car clubs and schemes like 'Slide Bristol' commuter transport: using an app to book a ride in 8-seater vehicles from a nearby location at a preferred time.

Q9 Do you have any other comments about the proposed transport vision?

A9 See our comments above