



Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance

Campaigning for Integrated Transport

www.tfgb.org.uk

South Bristol Link Road and Bus Rapid Transit (SBL)

For the route of this proposed combined new road and bus rapid transit go to http://travelplus.org.uk/media/179180/6%20chapter_1_scheme_desc_final.pdf (page 6)

(Please note that the level of BRT provision shown on this map has been reduced due to recent cost cuts – current details below.)

What is happening? On 9 September 2011, the West of England Partnership (WoEP – four local councils) is applying for funding to the Department for Transport (DfT) for this £45m scheme along with £50m BRT2 (Long Ashton Park and Ride to Cabot Circus) and £102m BRT3 (Northern fringe to Hengrove). TfGB has produced postcards objecting to SBL which local residents can send to Norman Baker, Under-Secretary for Local Transport (deadline 7 October).

Who will pay for the Link? Local Councils' contribution to the cost of SBL will be £17m (38% of the total £45m) North Somerset will pay £9m and Bristol £8m. Any cost overrun over £45m will be met by local councils. £4.1m of North Somerset's contribution will come from Bristol International Airport.

What's the alternative? Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance has opposed the SBL as a new road for five years. In January 2010, we sent over 1,000 postcards to the WoEP Executive Members asking them to apply for funding for the reopening of the Portishead rail line with new stations at Ashton Gate, Pill and Portishead (cost £43.3m) instead. They declined. We consider that urging the DfT to reject the SBL funding bid is now the best course of action because the current scheme is poor public transport value and environmentally destructive as a road. It could easily overrun in cost. If Bristol has £8m to spare, it could be spent on setting up an Integrated Transport Authority or funding a smartcard system which would have greater benefits for all travellers or a new Ashton Gate station.

The proposed road/BRT is in four sections – with different BRT provision on each stretch.

A370/Long Ashton Park and Ride to Brookgate

The new road (7.3 metre carriageway width) starts from a new junction on the Long Ashton bypass on the A370 and runs to Brookgate – a proposed new road link into the South Liberty Lane industrial area. A separate BRT-only road (not concrete guided track) will run from the Long Ashton Park and Ride to Brookgate where the BRT joins the road.

Brookgate to the A38

This will be a 7.3m road with nearside bus lanes which the BRT will use.

A38 to Cater Road Business Park

This will be a 7.3 metre road with no bus lanes except on approaches to junctions, where BRT will be given priority. The link road effectively ends at Cater Road by joining the existing road network. The road will be 40mph in the countryside and 30mph in town.

Cater Road to Hengrove

The BRT will use the existing roads and roundabout to reach Hengrove.

What bus will be used? The pictures used by the West of England Partnership show two vehicles – the Streetcar and the Ftr (used by First in York). Both are bendy buses. No decision has yet been announced. Six operators are involved in discussions. They may want to use other buses.

Why is the Link poor public transport value for money?

The SBL Bus Rapid Transit has largely lost the ‘qualities’ stressed in the promotional literature to ‘sell’ the system – segregation from other traffic leading to fast journey times, comfortable tram like ride, high levels of patronage leading to non-subsidised operation. **The current scheme is a low passenger, low frequency service likely to need subsidy which is only segregated and ‘rapid’ in the countryside but not in the urban area, and not at all ‘tram like’ because it is now simply a bus on a road.**

BRT Low passenger numbers and low frequency The South Bristol Link BRT runs over half its length through Greenbelt. In the built up area, it has only four stops before its terminus. The walking distance to these stops rules out their use by most residents of Bishopsworth and Withywood. 79 passengers (Long Ashton to Hengrove) are predicted for the am peak hour in 2016. Consultants have recommended a frequency of every 18 minutes peak and every 24 minutes off peak with a 30 minute ride from Hengrove Park to the Centre. North Somerset Councillors have been told that ‘during the first years of operation, the service (BRT2 and SBL) may require some financial support’.

BRT Not segregated nor rapid

None of the SBL BRT route uses concrete guided track which ensures ‘a tram like ride’. The only segregated part of SBL route is the short stretch between Long Ashton Park and Ride and Brookgate. To reach the centre, the SBL BRT will continue along the BRT2 route along the Cut and through the Harbour sharing the route with BRT2 bendy buses, airport buses and four North Somerset bus services. Buses on the three BRT routes (up to 60 per peak hour) will converge on Prince Street Bridge and create congestion on Wapping Road/Prince Street.

42 buses an hour (including SBL buses) will turn from behind M Shed into Wapping Road. BRT2 also has a bus stop in the middle of Prince Street, causing further queues. After Prince Street Bridge, in town SBL BRTs will not be segregated, have no priority measures using normal bus lanes and use main roads so will be no more ‘rapid’ than a normal bus. Only if BRT3 is funded, will BRT priority work in the city centre will be carried out.

Why is the SBL so environmentally destructive?

The Mott McDonald report on the environmental impacts of the SBL can be found at http://travelplus.org.uk/media/179464/10%20appen_38.pdf

It destroys agricultural land on the edge of the city It runs across a dozen fields currently used for dairy farming. Three farms will have their land split by the road.

It runs close to and crosses in four places the footpath from Long Ashton to Dundry which is also part of the 23 mile South Bristol Circular Walk It passes through Colliter’s Brook and involves the culverting and bridging of various water courses. Runoff will reduce water quality. It runs between Hanging Hill Wood (semi-ancient woodland) to the west and an SNCI to the east and through the Bishopsworth and Malago conservation area. Landtake will have a “large adverse” impact on greater and lesser horseshoe bats (in North Somerset and Mendip Bat SAC) and other European protected species such as otters and great crested newts and on local hedgerows.

It will be a prominent scar on the landscape The scheme will “further fragment the landscape, degrading levels of both audible and visual tranquillity. Views of the scheme will be afforded which would have an adverse impact on key receptors (residents) within local settlements”.

It takes land from Highridge Common The northern edge of the Common will be taken for the road and the quality of the rest of it reduced.

Green space is lost What is now quiet green space next to the Withywood primary school, sheltered home and housing will become a major traffic thoroughfare.

Severing the community The road will sever housing and sheltered accommodation from the primary school, Gatehouse Community Centre and local shops. Residents will need to cross the road to reach both sets of local shops. Four new traffic junctions are proposed. Air quality will be reduced and traffic noise introduced into this residential area. Hartcliffe and Withywood Ventures who run the Gatehouse Centre say “We feel strongly that a link along the currently ‘reserved’ route will divide communities and impede people’s access to amenities and open spaces. It will create a physical barrier between where children live and where they go to school”.

Traffic impact on residential roads Increased noise and air pollution will result. This effect will be worsened through road congestion. The new road crosses existing roads. This will mean a need for traffic lights, roundabouts and other traffic management measures and a knock-on effect of slower journey times and delays on these existing routes. In other areas the result of this has been an increase of congestion, noise and pollution in residential streets as car and particularly commercial vehicle drivers have sought to avoid bottlenecks.

Opening up the Greenbelt to development Despite assurances from Bristol City Council that the Greenbelt will not be developed around the road and it is “only a single carriageway”, we expect the triangle of land between the BRT and the road to be proposed for development immediately after the road is approved. A map within Bristol City Council shows this. Once this happens, we expect planning proposals to develop all the land on the Bristol side of the road so that the city is expanded across the North Somerset border giving Bristol a new edge.

The Avon New Cut and the Harbour The level of diesel buses described above would destroy the ambience and air quality of the Harbour and the Cut, and the current cycling and walking route from BS3 into town over Prince Street Bridge and down Wapping Road.

What about the road’s claimed benefits?

Job creation Job predictions connected with the SBL bid need to be subjected to a reality check. A report by Mott McDonald claims that the SBL will assist in the creation of 5,600 new jobs. The evidence is a list of vacant sites, 11 in Hengrove park, 3 sites in Novers Hill, South Liberty lane and elsewhere in Bedminster. Each of 14 sites is assessed according to a set formula for the total number of office and manufacturing jobs that could be accommodated on each site and the total is 5,600. Wishful thinking does not add up to job creation. The airport is said to “be short of land” and due to create another 2,000+ jobs when employment at BIA has actually fallen by 188 FTE jobs between 2008 and 2010 and the number of companies reduced by 2 to 43. Self check-in and the continued recession is expected to reduce existing jobs still further.

What about congestion?

Overall traffic will not be reduced. The proposal envisages “a small increase in the total distance travelled”. Anticipated reductions in traffic on the B3103 Barrow Gurney, A3029 Winterstoke Road, A38 through Bedminster and on local roads to the north will be balanced by increased traffic on the A370. No major reduction in road capacity is proposed in any of the locations to permanently capture any benefits from traffic reduction so they are likely to be short term.

Delays are estimated to be cut by 2% resulting in a reduction in journey time of 0.6% in the morning peak and 1% in the PM peak by 2031. The ‘economic’ benefits of the scheme which result in a high BCR (Benefit cost ratio) of over 5:1 (at least 2:1 normally required) are miniscule time savings for lots of motorists over a 60 year period. The highway benefits are £358m and

the public transport benefits £19.3m. The carbon reducing benefits are £0.5m. Noise, air quality and environmental degradation are not costed at all.

What about improving access to the City Centre and strategic transport networks?

Improving car access to the city centre using a new road defeats a range of Bristol City Council current policies to make the city centre more traffic-free, to encourage public transport use to the centre by restricting parking, and to stop commuter parking in residential areas. To fund the BRT the Council is considering a workplace parking charge which is aimed at reducing traffic. A new road also undermines the attractiveness of public transport and particularly the Council's own BRT proposals. It is not joined-up transport thinking.

Who wants more commuter traffic on the strategic transport network which is already overloaded? More car access to the strategic network assists the continuation and creation of commuter dormitories which at a time of increasing fuel prices is not good transport planning. Circular 0207 states that:

“It is Government transport policy, wherever possible, to look for alternatives to building new roads, by reducing the impact of road users on each other and the environment, improving road performance through better network management and making smarter journey choices (non-car journeys) easier.”