

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Health of the bus market, HC 1425

Monday 12 November 2018, Bristol

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Members present: Lilian Greenwood (Chair); Grahame Morris; Daniel Zeichner.

Questions 97 - 155

Witnesses

I: Tim Bowles, Mayor of the West of England, Jason Humm, Head of Transport, West of England Combined Authority, Karen Rose, Community Transport Adviser, Devon County Council, Derek Fishpool, Devon County Council, and Ralph Ellis, Public Transport Officer, Plymouth City Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Devon County Council](#)
- [Plymouth City Council](#)
- [West of England Local Authorities](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tim Bowles, Jason Humm, Karen Rose, Derek Fishpool and Ralph Ellis.

Q97 **Chair:** We are delighted to be here in Bristol, holding what I think is our first evidence session outside Westminster. We are really excited to be here. First of all, please can I ask you to introduce yourselves for our record of proceedings? Perhaps if I start with our left.

Karen Rose: Hello. Karen Rose, Community Transport Adviser at Devon County Council.

Jason Humm: Hello. I am Jason Humm. I am Head of Transport at the West of England Combined Authority.

Tim Bowles: Good afternoon. I am Tim Bowles, the Mayor of the West of England.

Ralph Ellis: Ralph Ellis, Public Transport Officer, Plymouth City Council.

Derek Fishpool: Derek Fishpool, Senior Public Transport Officer, Devon County Council.

Q98 **Chair:** You are all far better trained than I was because you remembered to switch your microphones on. If you can remember to do that when you are speaking, and the same for my colleagues, that would be great.

First of all, thank you very much for being here this afternoon. Obviously a lot of people have asked us today already, in the media, "Why have you come to Bristol? Why are you here in the West of England?" Part of the reason is that in the majority of the areas that you represent we are seeing increasing numbers of bus passenger journeys. I wanted to know, first of all, how much control have you had over those general increases in passenger numbers? How much are they as a result of action that you have taken rather than population growth or other things outside your control? Tim, as the combined authority Mayor, would you like to start us off with what you think the answers are?

Tim Bowles: Of course. Welcome to the West of England. That is the important thing to say, first of all. What I will do, if I may, is try to just paint a little picture of the combined authority. I am sure you are very familiar with them—I think some of you represent constituencies that are part of combined authorities—but from our perspective here in the West of England, that is the important starting place. It is about how, as councils, we have come together to try to do things differently and to focus on the economic growth of the region. It is a very successful region but a region in which we know, as councils coming together, there are many things that we have to work very hard on. Transport is key to that.

We are a very successful region. We are the only core city region that is a net contributor back to the Treasury. Consequently, our challenge as a



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combined authority is to ensure that the region continues to be in a position to succeed. All of us are very clear about how we want to make sure that we are building inclusive growth into our agendas. We are already seeing a lot of positives because of the devolution agenda. We are seeing millions of additional pounds coming into the region through Government and elsewhere. For us today it is around transport and how buses play a really important role in how, as a region, we are going to address the future transport challenges. It is vital that we make sure our connectivity is improving all the time. It is vital that we are looking at a mix of different ways in which people move around the region. To do that, we have to address it in a number of different ways.

It is important that we have a plan for the future. Coming together as a combined authority, our role is to think strategically for the future. That is why we are producing a regional transport plan, of which buses are a vital part. Within that regional transport plan are plans around new homes, new business sites and how the region expands and grows. They are all part of it. For us, as I say, this is a key element of the local bus strategy and part of our transport plan. You have touched already on growth in population, growth in economy and the success of our universities in attracting more students. Yes, the population and the number of potential users in the region has grown, but it is a case of looking at how elements of investment have been made in the past that have resulted in a lot of the increase, and how we as a combined authority can address that and continue that growth.

While we have had issues recently—everybody in the combined authority, as with the rest of the councils, has been working closely with the operators and we are holding them to account in those areas—we are also now seeing the results of significant investment. Investment from the DfT, investment from local authorities and investment from operators themselves that have formed part of the Greater Bristol Bus Network. That has seen some £80 million of additional investment into buses across the region.

Q99 Chair: What have been the significant measures you have used that investment to fund, which have led to the growth in bus passengers?

Tim Bowles: Within the Greater Bristol Bus Network, which was work that was already taking place beforehand, it is around working with the operators who have been investing in new buses. In terms of how the local authorities—who are still the transport bodies—are looking at addressing bus measures within transport, as well as investment, I am sure we will touch on it later in things like our MetroBus system, which forms part of our new mass rapid transport system.

There have been measures all the way through—from DfT direct funding at the top to operators working together with local authorities. I think the key has been the way in which those strategic partners have worked together to address different aspects. We have seen investment in RTI, we have seen investment around routes and we are seeing investment



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from the operators in new buses themselves, and that is part of how we have been working together. That is the really important aspect: everybody has come together to see those increased numbers that are bucking the national trends.

Q100 **Chair:** Derek, looking at Devon, what has been the experience there around bus passenger numbers and what have been the significant things that you think have influenced people's propensity to travel by bus in the county?

Derek Fishpool: As Tim has said, we have obviously experienced population growth but we have also worked very hard with our main operators. We have good working relationships with all our operators, who have invested considerably in improving vehicles and improving reliability as much as they possibly can. We have used section 106 funding from developments to enhance services to try to make sure that those new services are into new developments right from the start, so that people, if they move into a new housing estate, have a service there from day one or as near as possible. We have seen, since about 2002, some 40% increase in passenger numbers. That has just started over the last couple of years to level off somewhat. We could not sustain that growth forever. It is a package of being able to work together. We have been very supported by our members, who always support public transport, and we have done a lot to encourage people to use those facilities that are there.

Q101 **Chair:** Thank you. Ralph, what has been your experience in Plymouth? Is it similar to what we have heard from Devon, Bristol and the wider combined authority, or is it a bit different?

Ralph Ellis: Patronage has been fairly steady over the last 10 years, give or take a little bit each year. It is beginning to climb up a little bit more now. I agree with Derek; we do enjoy good relationships with both Plymouth Citybus, part of the Go-Ahead Group, and Stagecoach South West, who moved into Plymouth in 2015. Both have invested lots of money in new vehicles, which is very welcome. The city council has worked with the operators. We meet on a regular basis and we have developed a joint ticketing multi-operator ticket called Skipper. We have invested in real-time information. Between us, it is looking very promising.

Q102 **Chair:** Can I ask all the members of the panel—I am not sure who is best placed to answer this—about local transport plans, how you incorporate buses and how you prioritise spending on bus and other transport options? Can someone tell me a little bit about what you have done in your transport plans to improve bus ridership? Who would like to kick off? Jason?

Jason Humm: Thank you, Chair. Shall I pick up on that? Within West of England Combined Authority we have a joint local transport plan. We have been working for quite a considerable number of years jointly



across, not just the three unitary authorities within West of England, but also with North Somerset as well because the interaction of the network and travel patterns stretches over a slightly wider area. For ourselves, bringing in a joint approach with the transport plan allows all of the forms of transport to be picked up—how they interact but also how that interacts over the wider area.

Our bus strategy is a key part of that jigsaw within the local transport plan and then the bus strategy itself has a wide number of facets to it—whether that is the network review, the network that we have, how we work with the operators and how we lever best value out of some of the partnerships that we have. Also, what happens in terms of our revenue-supported services and how they interact, or the options for bringing some of our community transport into local hubs—and not necessarily always relying on a typical bus network approach. There is how we make use of some of our new technology as well, because we know that transport patterns are changing and expectations of people using the bus network are changing as well.

Then there are those elements you have already heard about in terms of infrastructure investment, how that is built in—not only to learn from what we have done over previous years but to make sure that it is integral in terms of our infrastructure plan for the next joint local transport plan. Again, that infrastructure plan not only has to pick up all transport modes but has to reflect what we want to try to prioritise for buses, in terms of the bus strategy being part of that joint local transport plan, what we measure, how we understand what our current performance is, how we understand what our aspirations are, and how we are tracking that to see whether we are making a difference in the way we invest as well.

Q103 Chair: What is the timeframe for your transport plan? How many years does it cover?

Jason Humm: It takes us up to 2036. Quite rightly, it is a long-term and visionary document but it also has some key elements of implementation in a much shorter phase as well. If we look at that next 20-year period, we have certain transport and travel habits and we have certain modes of transport that are more embedded in the culture in terms of the way that people travel. We are recognising that is changing as well. Making sure that not just the bus strategy, but also our joint local transport plan accounts for how people's travel patterns will change and what it will look like in the future, is all part of making sure those documents are fit for purpose.

Q104 Chair: People listening at home will have heard a lot of what will sound to them like jargon, I suspect. If I am the person sitting somewhere in the West of England thinking about, "What will transport look like in 20 years?", can you spell out in easy-to-understand language what they will see their local authority or combined authority doing, what that will mean in terms of what transport in this part of the world looks like, and how



they will know whether it has been successful? What are your goals that they can judge you against?

Jason Humm: I think the best approach to the question is to start at the end and work backwards. That element of how we will know, certainly for the West of England area, is about continued growth and prosperity within the region. The economic vitality of the region is key. Clearly if more people want to live and work here that is very positive but also that brings with it some challenges in terms of how you best use that environment. One of the key indicators of success is continuing economic growth and prosperity—getting the best for our communities.

There are some elements of crystal ball gazing in terms of how you then begin to implement that or how people will see their travel patterns changing, but certainly what we know is that use of technology is key for us. We do know that use of our network during peak hours is a challenge. We know that there are some constraints in terms of congestion. If we look at traditionally people travelling at those peak hours and traditionally nationally travelling by car, there need to be some changes. Those partly will be led by the environment because people's travel patterns will reflect the environment they are within, but it also needs to be led within the approaches and the policies that we set.

On what that will look like, in my own view—I suppose it is a question to me so it is a personal view—the ability to make better use of more mass transport is key; whether that is buses, which would be great, or whether it is technology and how people car-share. Certainly some of the sustainability issues in terms of cycling and walking are going to be key for us. Obviously West of England has aspirations to find a mass rapid transit solution for the future and that is something we would look at probably within the timescale for that plan.

Certainly over the next five to 10 years there will be that use of traditional forms of transport that we are seeing at the moment, with maybe the integration of technology to make us use what we have a lot more efficiently, supported by some of those infrastructure changes and those policy changes that we can make to guide some of those travel habits we already know are changing.

Q105 **Chair:** Would it be fair to say that as a result of increasing congestion, rising population and air quality concerns, you want to see fewer people driving and more people using other options—whether it is walking and cycling or public transport of various sorts? Would that be right? Is that a shared view?

Derek Fishpool: Yes, definitely. We have to bear in mind that we as an authority are responsible for buses and having a strategy for that, but also walking, cycling, lorries, rail and even cars. It is getting that balance, but as has been said, if we can move more people to using some form of mass transport system to relieve the congestion that is building all the time, that has to be a positive move.



Q106 **Chair:** Does that mean carrot, stick or a bit of both?

Derek Fishpool: Probably a bit of both. We already have things like bus lanes in our main city, which is Exeter, but it is a historic city. It is hard to do certain things to the infrastructure and the road network in places like that. We cannot just flatten whole areas to improve road space and so on. Yes, we do have air quality issues in certain areas and we also have congestion in smaller towns like Newton Abbot and Barnstaple, where it is even harder to address than in a big city because bus frequencies and things do not tend to be so good.

Q107 **Chair:** Ralph, when you are looking at Devon—not Devon. You are Plymouth, are you not? Sorry. In Plymouth, are the challenges particularly acute there? Obviously you are a city. Do you have air quality issues to address?

Ralph Ellis: Yes, we do have air quality corridors. The most important thing is that road space is limited. While we can increase road space to a certain extent, a lot of it will be limited and it is about making the most efficient use of that road space by encouraging people to mode-shift to buses, cycling and walking. The aim is to try to make bus travel as attractive, as quick and as convenient as—or more convenient and quicker than—the car. That is the secret: getting people out of cars. That is the challenge.

Q108 **Chair:** Karen, I know you have responsibility for community transport. Where do you see community transport fitting into the local transport plans?

Karen Rose: Obviously we do see it as part of the overall plan. It has a part to play. The way that we look at any solutions to providing transport is to be as modally agnostic as we can, and just try to find the best solution to meet whatever need there is. We try to be consistent with our funding with whomever we are working with, be it commercial or community organisations, to ensure that the best service is provided that can be. In terms of our public transport support, we try to ensure that no community is left unserved. While we have the level of funding that we do at the moment, that is our objective—that we are in that position where we ensure that no small village or community is without an option for some kind of transport.

Q109 **Daniel Zeichner:** Good afternoon. Could I just come back on that? “No community left unserved” can mean some kind of option once a week or once a day. It does not necessarily mean much on Sundays or for shift workers in the early evening or late evening. It has been a very rosy picture painted so far, but I have to say it does not correspond exactly with what people tell me is happening in much of the country and I find it hard to believe Devon is that different. What has the reality been for people in small villages, possibly even small market towns, as I say, on Sundays?



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Karen Rose: Yes, of course, challenging. As you have said, it is not such a rosy picture. Particularly in deeper rural areas it is a challenge where we are looking at things like just weekly bus services to market towns, and the same with community transport practitioners as well. Quite often it is ensuring that each village has a weekly service to get to essential shopping, backed up with other options such as voluntary car schemes to help people get to medical appointments at other times. We have a very good sector that does also provide more journeys at weekends, particularly to help people get out and about for leisure reasons.

We have experimented. We have put funding into supporting services to trial services for things like evening workers in remote rural areas. We did this in Ilfracombe, up on the North Devon coast, working with a community operator, and they were working with volunteer drivers to very late hours. The service did help people into employment opportunities but of course there is a very high cost attached to that per passenger usage.

Q110 **Chair:** One of the things we are aware of is that Devon County Council and areas in the West of England partnership were part of a total transport pilot that obviously is trying to effectively get more bang for your buck by combining different sorts of transport. Can you tell us a bit about the total transport pilot—what you tried out and whether it worked, did not work or what lessons you learnt from that?

Karen Rose: The good news is that the service is still operating. We started our pilot back in May 2016 and we provide a patient transport advice service. The main non-emergency ambulance provider is commissioned through the clinical commissioners but all other transport is booked through us in the transport co-ordination service through a dynamic purchasing system, which is our tendering process. Basically, staff assess eligibility for transport and book appropriate journeys via a bespoke booking system. Journeys are all booked through accredited providers. If a journey is not eligible then we can help with alternatives, suggesting public or community transport options. One of the benefits to all parties has been that it has broadened the number of providers who are available. It has given further scope for the operators and for the passengers and the NHS as well. That service is still in operation.

Q111 **Chair:** Do you think that is a model that you could use more broadly? In terms of thinking about transport to rural areas, is maybe a bus service that goes around absolutely everywhere once a week the way forward or do you think this more on-demand or demand-responsive model might be a better option? What are the lessons learned?

Karen Rose: In terms of the passenger advice service, some lessons learned are that it does take a while to build up the partnership that is required to make things happen. The benefits are better planning, refining eligibility, as I mentioned, opening up a larger supplier basis, and good financial management of those processes. The challenge is marrying up the different processes of different parties and managing expectations,



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which I think has been mentioned previously. At this stage it is quite difficult to quantify any financial benefits because there were challenges at the start with the quality and quantity of existing data. Sharing data has been an issue. Perseverance is a big issue there. We have had a lot of different people come and go in that partnership and it is about maintaining contacts with people who have the relevant information to make sure we can help that process go forward.

As far as having a service that is responsive, the most important thing is to make sure that it is something that people can rely on. If it is demand-responsive, it has to be a service that people can be sure is actually going to be there at the time that they wish to travel, not a service that offers to be demand-responsive but then is not available when someone phones to make a booking. That is very important.

Q112 Chair: Does anybody else on the panel want to add to that point around total transport or how you can better link different sorts of services, whether it is transport to hospital or school transport, with bus services or dial-a-ride community transport?

Derek Fishpool: The issue, however you do it, is how much it costs. To serve these very rural communities in any shape or form is costly. We are always looking to serve them in the most cost-effective way we can, whether that is a bus, a shared taxi, a fare car or whatever. It is costly in comparison to moving the larger numbers of people that you will always get in an urban environment.

Q113 Chair: Just moving on a little bit to issues around accessibility—obviously there will be some overlap with some of the people who would have been using the services we have just been discussing—all buses have to be wheelchair-accessible by 2020. There are other aspects of accessibility that are not covered by that, such as audio-visual “next stop” information that obviously makes buses more accessible, possibly to everybody, not just to those with a visual or sensory impairment. What have you been doing to ensure that your buses and bus stops are accessible and what are the sorts of challenges that you have been facing as local authorities in doing that?

Ralph Ellis: We have gone to a new real-time provider, hopefully providing a much more reliable system that shows far more real-time than scheduled time. As far as other accessible vehicles are concerned, obviously in comparison to my colleagues in Devon our dial-a-ride service is much smaller, but it is interesting that Plymouth Citybus put a sum of money into the service to reflect the fact that conventional buses cannot reach some parts of the estates, and obviously some parts of the estates that could be accessed would never be a viable service. We acknowledge and we appreciate the fact that Citybus have put some money into the dial-a-ride service so that, as a fall-back, people will hopefully not be isolated. That option is always there. Obviously it is not the same flexibility as a normal bus service; it has to be booked in advance and while people who want to travel on the service have to be eligible for a



national concessionary pass in terms of age or disability, the pass is not valid on the service. You do have to pay a cash fare. As I say, in comparison with my colleagues from Devon, it is a small part of our business.

Q114 Chair: Anything to add in terms of those issues around accessibility in its broadest sense—both for disabled people and for people who for other reasons might be excluded from transport?

Tim Bowles: If I may, Chair, a lot of those aspects have traditionally sat with our councils. As a combined authority, as we have more influence in those areas, clearly they have to be part of the planning in terms of people being able to access the stops, making sure that the RTI that we have invested significantly in already is operational and functional, and that then links in with those other aspects around apps and all the other media that backs it up. From our perspective, yes, we are investing in those things. That is an early part of our journey but it will be significant to everything that we are doing.

I will also go back, if I may, to accessibility. It is about some of the things that Jason has touched on. In our strategy, a lot of that will be assessing what our networks look like. The most important thing is, first, that there is a service that is able to reach people who need to be able to use buses as a way to travel to work and other essential services. That will be very much part of the network analysis that we are doing in the bus strategy. I absolutely endorse the fact that we need to make sure that our operators are investing in their fleets and that they are supporting them, both through their technology and the technology of the combined authority or the councils. That backs up their RTI and the apps.

The other key is a route network review to make sure that we are accessing people so they can then start using buses. That might well be through new forms of connectivity. We heard about it a little earlier—the way in which people are able to connect from different parts of the region to those main strategic routes that will then give genuine access across the region. It is a mix. It is not just, if I may, making sure that things are reaching both today's and tomorrow's standards of accessibility around wheelchairs and everything else, but making sure we are looking at how we can connect people to those routes.

Q115 Daniel Zeichner: Just on accessibility issues, we hear sometimes from small operators that it is harder for them economically to make the kinds of adjustments needed—the audio-visual changes and things—though they will be required to by law at some point. How confident are you that if I went and spoke to people across your areas who have mobility problems or are poorly sighted, they would feel the system is set up for them at the moment? There are some innovative things that are being done in some places around wheelchair access to buses and so on. Are you doing that? Are you confident that you are there with that?



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Ralph Ellis: The whole fleet in Plymouth now is fully accessible. We have bus borders, raised curbs that we have provided in the past, though at the moment the two main bus operators are very concerned that if we put bus borders in, we have to make sure that it is a very smooth run-in. In the past, where bus borders have been installed, there has been some near-side front damage to vehicles. While the operators appreciate bus borders, they are very concerned that they go in the right place and at the right angle.

We have very little ABR at the moment. From the council's point of view, we would fully support ABR, we would absolutely support it.

Q116 **Daniel Zeichner:** Can I just press you on that then? You say you have very little. What can you do about it?

Ralph Ellis: We can only encourage the operators and if that becomes part of the Government strategy for buses, then we would fully support ABR. At the moment I do not think we would be in a position to help install it, financially.

Derek Fishpool: We have some very real concerns, particularly with our smaller operators, about the cost of any additional equipment that is required. We have seen a big decrease in the number of operators in the Devon area. It has about halved in the last 40 years, which is reflected in that if we put tenders out, we have less people to go for them. A lot of our operators are coming up to retiring age. They are family businesses and they have no one to take it on. We have operators who have had their businesses up for sale for quite some time, with no takers. The worst scenario is that any additional costs that go into the business could tip them over the edge and they will take the easy option of withdrawing and closing down. That is a challenge that we need to bear in mind, particularly with our smaller operators.

Also, in rural areas, putting in things like bus borders is much more difficult. Often we are talking of roads that do not even have footpaths, where it is not much good putting in a bus border because there is nowhere for anybody to go. We do have to bear all that in mind when we are looking at some of the deep rural areas that we are trying to serve. It is easy enough in towns and cities but it is a different scenario in rural areas.

Q117 **Chair:** That brings me on neatly to my next question. How easy to find and how useful is the current guidance around bus planning that is provided by the Department for Transport, including its accessibility guidance? Does it reflect the needs of both rural and urban areas? If not, what should be better? What should be different? Who wants to start off on that one? Jason.

Jason Humm: If I may, Chair, I was hoping just to pick up on the last point. We mentioned some really positive bits but there are a couple of bits that we had not said. Provision of information upfront is key to



people that have accessibility challenges. Certainly provision of information to them or to somebody who supports them can help give them confidence to get on the bus in the first place. That is key. There are the elements of infrastructure upgrade I think Ralph mentioned, but also improvements in terms of working with your operators to improve the buses themselves. That can make a big difference.

Probably the key one for me is driver training because of the support the driver can give to any passengers. It could be something simple like not setting off too early, waiting for the person who is struggling with their mobility to be comfortable on their seat before they set off. Having consistent drivers on consistent routes helps as well. It is not always possible, but particularly in some of the rural areas it does make quite a big difference in terms of both the confidence and the comfort that people with mobility challenges can find when they get on buses.

I have now—sorry—forgotten the next question. Apologies.

Q118 Chair: It was about the guidance. To what extent is the guidance useful? Is it right for both urban and rural areas or are there gaps in guidance or places where the guidance just does not fit with what your experience is?

Jason Humm: They are quite different beasts to try to serve with similar guidance. The discussion that we have had in terms of those accessibility issues for rural areas is about how a bus service can best fit the needs of maybe isolated communities, whereas when you are in heavily or densely populated urban areas with those elements we spoke of initially, including congestion, it is about how you can use a bus network for moving many people quickly and efficiently from point A to point B. There is a disconnect between those two elements.

In the best guidance, you would use your efficiencies—in terms of how you get your network operating as well as possible and the financial stability that could bring—to potentially then cross-populate to some of your accessibility issues. I do not necessarily think that is picked up well enough in the guidance at present.

Q119 Chair: Does anyone else want to add anything to that?

Derek Fishpool: It is somewhat different in an urban and a rural area. Perhaps the guidance, quite naturally, is often more geared to the heavy urban areas.

Q120 Chair: A final question from me for a little bit. One of the things that has been noted is that while the Government have a rail strategy, an aviation strategy and even a cycling and walking strategy, there is not, at the moment, a bus strategy or framework from central Government. Do you think that would be a positive and if so, what would you want to see included in a central Government bus strategy? Ralph, you look like you are dying to jump in.



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Ralph Ellis: Obviously it would have to cover a lot of things: air quality, congestion, demand management. We are currently talking to a major employer in Plymouth about charging to park and maybe then using that money to support local bus services into the area concerned. That would be a start for us. I know it follows on from Nottingham and other places but that would certainly be an interesting development from Plymouth.

As for congestion charging, there is no appetite for that at the moment in Plymouth but it could be something in the future. Obviously that would be a major issue.

Q121 **Chair:** Do you think that central Government should play more of a role in making those things easier to do at a local level? I recognise that politically it is very difficult to do any sort of road charging and so on.

Ralph Ellis: Yes. Take the example of Manchester. Simplistically, no one is going to vote for being charged to use the roads that they have always used for free in the past. The challenge is how to get around that. How do we get a congestion charge if it is felt necessary?

Q122 **Chair:** Who else would like to tell me what should be in a bus strategy from central Government?

Derek Fishpool: That change that Ralph has just said can only come by improving public transport to such a level that it is a very attractive alternative to what people are currently doing. That is the challenge, both politically and for operators and so on to do.

Q123 **Chair:** As a council, what would you look to central Government to do that might help you to shape your bus strategy and achieve that sort of modal shift that you are looking for?

Derek Fishpool: Perhaps some more definite guidance on restricting road use, whether that be single-occupancy vehicles or so on. As Ralph has said, workplace charging may be a possibility. Just perhaps centrally strengthening some of these issues so that they are easier to implement in areas like Devon.

Q124 **Chair:** Tim, how do you see these issues? It is the chicken and the egg, really. If you do not have the money to invest in public transport, how do you make the public transport good enough to lure people out of their cars?

Tim Bowles: You have almost led me into what would be the core of my answer. I say this around a number of challenges that people ask me about. It is about being very clear to central Government about who has the levers and the tools to make a difference. At the moment, in this area and a lot of other public transport areas, within Government—and I think it has been the case for a long time—there are a lot of different Departments, all of whom have different aspects and different elements of those tools and levers. Ultimately, it is going to be about how funding



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is supported and devolved, accepting of course that there are different models around the UK in terms of local government.

Putting those sort of things to one side for the moment, if we think about it, clearly DfT are recognised but there is also CLG and Health. Buses and public transport fit in lots of different areas. It is how, within Government, we can get Government to be looking at this collectively. By the way, I do not say this exclusively about public transport and buses; I say it in lots of other areas that affect us. That is the really important thing. It is central Government understanding what their role would be, how the funding would become available, how that funding would be devolved and who those decision-makers are, but also how each of the Departments within Government can come together to make sure that this is a joined-up piece of strategy that is coming out of Westminster and Whitehall.

Q125 Chair: How do you see that happening? What else would you like to add? That is a really important point. Of course, if you can tackle social isolation or loneliness, providing transport might be in one budget but the savings might be in a completely different budget—one that is not devolved to the local area. Do you think that is properly recognised? Are there things that Government could do to enable you to better understand the way in which costs and savings fall in different places and outside different silos?

Ralph Ellis: A major challenge for the operators and for the councils is the English national concessionary pass system, which does give free travel for certain categories. A huge part of some of the operators' total revenue is based on that. It does then present a budget challenge to the local authorities. Where do we go with this? For our two main operators, it is a huge part of their revenue over which they have no control. They have to give free travel, we have to pay for it, and it is not reflecting their increased costs. There is always a danger then—not so much in Plymouth but you do hear these stories—of buses running around full up but losing money because no one is paying a fare. That is certainly a challenge in some of the smaller towns, perhaps. Hopefully not in Plymouth, but it is a challenge.

Q126 Chair: There is obviously a value to that, which is not perhaps captured in those costs, in terms of keeping people independent and so on.

Ralph Ellis: Yes. It comes at a cost. Somewhere along the line, someone has to pay for that bus fare.

Q127 Chair: Jason, I think you wanted to add something on a bus strategy and what should or should not be in it.

Jason Humm: Yes. Thank you, Chair. The element that I think everybody has touched on, that long-term stability in terms of investment and planning, is key. Of course it depends what goes into a strategy but if there is some help around how we can get more confident in terms of approaches going forward and funding going forward, that



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certainly helps. That allows you to mix that investment approach into your planning and your housing strategies and into your local transport strategies as well. Certainly a longer-term view, which is probably lacking because we do not have a national bus strategy, is key.

Giving a steer in terms of how to prioritise or incentivise investment in bus measures is probably missing and could be picked up in a strategy as well. Certainly the prioritisation work and appraisal frameworks that DfT operate at the moment do not necessarily reflect bus priority schemes particularly well. There is quite a heavy emphasis in terms of impact on car journey times. Again, that is not necessarily in balance in terms of some of the previous answers and where we need to get to. The ability to learn from other people and have it as a central source for some good practice—whether that is around some of the innovation that we have talked about or some of the smart ticketing solutions—is lacking without a central, co-ordinated strategy as well. That is probably what I thought would be in the strategy. Thank you.

Chair: That was quite a good list there of some of the things that you would want to see. We have already started touching on and talking about some of the factors that affect bus use but we are going to look at that in a bit more detail now. I am going to hand over to Grahame for this section.

Q128 Grahame Morris: Good afternoon, everyone. Some of the ground you have already covered because you have given full answers to the earlier questions, but there are just a couple of things I would like to clarify. As we have heard, nationally we lack a bus strategy, although we have a strategy for rail and a strategy for air travel. Perhaps I will start with Jason. The answers you gave earlier about the transport plans for the West of England, did I hear right there? Is there a specific strategy for buses within that overall plan? There is? That plan has been published and so on?

Jason Humm: Yes. We are actually out to consultation with our joint local transport plan, of which the bus strategy is part, in January of next year. Yes, it is included. No, we are not out in terms of consultation yet.

Q129 Grahame Morris: I appreciate that. In terms of what the Committee is about, when we were travelling here today the press were raising all sorts of issues with us about, “What advice are you going to give to the Mayor? What are you going to tell the bus operators?”, and so on. Essentially, what we are here to do is to listen to your experience of what has worked and what has not worked, and to identify what positive things there are, because you have bucked the national trend here. I know that there are a number of factors at play, but what positive factors can we see in Bristol that we can apply elsewhere? What practical issues have you experienced that are problematic?

Regarding some of the earlier things you said about measures that have been taken to actively encourage people to choose to move on to buses



and away from cars—we have heard about bus lanes and I think Ralph or Derek talked about making better use of existing road space. In terms of the reason for that shift, what about data-sharing? You have touched on that as well, Jason. Is that something that we could do more of? You have one dominant operator here in Bristol. We have had evidence from FirstGroup. We see a different regulatory framework in London and a much broader spread of the available data. Is that something that we could learn some lessons from?

Jason Humm: Thank you. Yes, understanding your data and your travel patterns is key. Understanding your customer and what the customers need is quite critical as well. In terms of the data that you touched on, the strength of the relationship with your operators or certainly your key operator is quite critical to that. The ability within the guidance to enter into some kind of partnership with a varying degree of formality is what local authorities, certainly those in the West of England, have been doing for a number of years anyway. That allows you to share that information between the local authority and an operator, and fundamentally both aspirations are quite well aligned in terms of what each party wants to achieve. Making sure the data is shared is key to that.

Where the legislation is a little bit light—and I am sure we will come on to franchising at some point—is around truly understanding an operator's challenges on costs. Certainly that then begins to reflect into a combined authority or local authority's ability to provide revenue support for supported services. So, while the need to share data is critical, that is reflected by the strength of the relationship with the operator. Some of the legislation is probably a little bit light in terms of the finances that underpin that, to truly understand how effective some of the changes are, unless you were to go down a franchising route. There are some challenges around a franchising route, as I am sure you will be aware, but that is a bit of a gap in terms of the available information that is not able to be shared at present.

Q130 Grahame Morris: I am grateful. I think we are going to come on to franchising a little bit later because in the West of England you have that option, which is not necessarily open to other areas outside of London. In relation to this particular section about factors that are affecting bus use and practical things that local authorities can do, I do understand there is enormous pressure on local government budgets due to central Government cuts but specifically what are you doing to improve the reliability of bus services and to tackle congestion? Jason, do you wish to start?

Jason Humm: Absolutely correct. Reliability, punctuality and confidence around journey times, as well as issues around fares and quality, are key to customers. The practical steps that we have been taking thus far are around that joint approach with the operator. What can they invest in terms of their fleet? What can we invest, ourselves in the unitary authorities, in terms of infrastructure changes on the street? Again, they can fall into two aspects.



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One is around changes to road space or potential reallocation of road space, which does have its challenges in terms of support for communities but again allows the physical environment through which the bus is travelling, to become more efficient. That then helps with that punctuality and confidence, and therefore has helped us improve some of those passenger numbers. Certainly the speed of travel is also influenced by how people board the bus as well, the time taken to pay the driver, find the change and work out which stop you are going to. Again, we have done some good work around off-bus ticketing, smart ticketing and travelcards, which has been really positive. That allows your bus to reduce its dwell time at stops. Reducing that obviously speeds the bus time as a comparator in relation to vehicle times.

Then there is the other element in terms of the environment. There is how quickly the bus can travel through its environment, and then there is the environment within which the passenger is waiting, with that provision of real-time information. We have, I think, about 900 units out across the West of England region, which is really positive. Are there enough bus shelters? Are they long enough? If you are increasing your patronage, are people stood and waiting in the rain? Have you analysed the stops, if you are upping the frequency on some of your key routes that are within an acceptable walking distance of where the majority of your communities are based? We have looked at a huge amount of that. They are good carrots.

There are also some—I would not necessarily call them “sticks”—legislative controls that already exist. We can already enforce parking restrictions. If people are parking where they should not be, how do we prioritise that along some of our key routes? Again, that moves that congestion out of the way and allows the free-flowing movement of traffic. Bus lanes and bus gates again are elements that unitary authorities have the power to enforce, and that again is a complementary approach.

There is where your resident parking zones are and how far out they stretch. Certainly over the last couple of years across our area we have done some really positive work in reducing the impact on those communities, but also encouraging people to not drive and park in the nearest residential area and then walk, but actually to use the bus. Then there are elements like: what is the future for powers within the Traffic Management Act? Do we need some of those further powers that would help control?

- Q131 **Grahame Morris:** I wanted to ask about that. I wonder if I might ask Tim. We have had some written evidence and we have had some briefings about the Greater Bristol Bus Network and the influence that had on 10 key routes across the city. It was an £80 million investment beginning in 2008. There is that issue about part 6 of the Traffic Management Act. The Committee has consistently supported that before I was a member of it, and continues to, but in response the Minister says



that local authorities do not want these powers. Is that true?

Tim Bowles: I have not heard that mentioned in any of my conversations with the Minister. On the GBBN, Greater Bristol Bus Network, you are absolutely right; £80 million. As I touched on earlier, that is a mix of DfT, the main operator, First, but also the local authorities, both direct funding and also contributions from developers around section 106 monies. That is really important. It has been vital. It has seen 120 new buses. What Jason has talked about in terms of investment in those bus stops and shelters is a really important part of usage. We have touched on real-time information.

Those are all parts that feed into it, but—I was scribbling a note to myself earlier around this—the highways authorities functions still sit with the local authorities. It is important. That is part of our relationship and something we as a combined authority, once we have more powers in place, will be working on: how we tie in and do that enforcement aspect, how we can make those green routes work more effectively, and how we can look at how the lanes interact and really make some differences. A lot of work was done under the GBBN aspect and it was a really good start, but it is that piece we have to carry forward. On some of those aspects you have just touched on, if we are to genuinely be able to work regionally across that piece, yes, I do think we need more powers in that space.

Q132 **Grahame Morris:** Tim, specifically in relation to the context of the West of England, do you think the Government should enact part 6 of the Traffic Management Act?

Tim Bowles: This is where I am going to look to Jason. Please excuse the fact that I cannot tell you what part 6 says verbatim. The principle you outlined to me earlier—

Grahame Morris: Disregarding traffic regulations—right turns at junctions, box junction markings and so on—to speed up the traffic.

Daniel Zeichner: Ralph is dying to—

Ralph Ellis: One of the questions which (inaudible PTV 02:30:45) asked me on Thursday afternoon, I spoke to him—

Tim Bowles: As colleagues here are so keen to pick it up may I—

Chair: I am conscious that we are 25 minutes from the end of our session and we have loads we want to hear so succinct answers will be much appreciated. If the answer is, “Yes, we want those powers,” just say, “Yes”.

Ralph Ellis: Yes, Plymouth does want those powers, especially in relation to box junctions, thank you.



Jason Humm: Yes, and, as a combined authority, the ability for the combined authority to run with those as well will help that central co-ordination.

Karen Rose: In Devon, we took the matter to Cabinet in the summer but there was not considered to be a network management problem with moving traffic in things like bus lanes; it was more an issue of civil parking enforcement for parking in bus lanes. At the moment no problem has really been identified either by ourselves or by our local bus companies, except for the parking issue.

Q133 **Grahame Morris:** In relation to the DfT guidance from 1997 for bus priority measures, what is your view on how useful the guidance has been in assisting the smooth flow of traffic to address congestion and improve the efficiency of the bus priority measures?

Jason Humm: It is useful to document that it is now 20 years old and things have moved on a fair bit. Some of the key principles in terms of the steps you might take to prioritise buses are still relevant. However, things we have probably already covered today—elements around technology, ticketing, smart cards, apps, contactless payments—are not picked up within the guidance. It does not link that well in terms of interchange between routes and also complementary modes. I think we have learnt more about that over the last 20 years.

We just talked about enforcement and the powers within the Traffic Management Act. Again, that is lacking so how that is embedded within a guidance note would be key. Partnership and franchising have moved on massively from where we were in 1997. Financial pressures and the environment are considerably different as well, particularly around revenue support for some of those proposals. While you may have the capital to implement some of the steps that are suggested in the guidance, the landscape for that is massively different than it was in 1997.

The elements around patronage and best practice—in some instances removing bus priority measures to get a better flow for the network that allows the bus to get to where it needs to be quicker—again, are changes we have probably learnt over the last 20 years.

Yes, I think an update is valid and, yes, I think things have moved on.

Grahame Morris: Derek and Ralph do you concur with that; do you have a similar view?

Ralph Ellis: Yes, in general terms. As I said earlier, we have responsibility for all modes of transport, not just buses, so it is in the balance. From our point of view, as much as possible we want to see anything implemented that helps buses.

Q134 **Grahame Morris:** This is a subject we have already talked about very briefly and is something that has been raised with the Committee by



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passengers—the availability of bus information to service users, particularly the deficiencies of online and in-time timetable changes, and the availability of printed timetables for passengers, especially disabled and elderly passengers, who request them and at bus stops. What is your view on that?

Karen Rose: Certainly as an authority we have continued to produce bus information in a printed format as well as information online. We have something we call our “Travel Devon” website that collects together information on walking, cycling, buses and trains, offers things like trail maps, e-timetables, an interactive bus map, ticket information and includes things like travel tips for people who may be less used to using those various modes of travel. For us it has been important to continue to provide printed information for those less able to use online information, but to complement that with information at the bus stop, online and for people to have in their hand as well.

Derek Fishpool: Our main commercial operator is very good at producing printed timetables at bus stops and where they are supported services we try to do the same from a council point of view.

As Karen said, there is a range of information there from websites—whether our own or the main bus operators—the south-west PTI information system and real-time information at the main stops in towns. There is a pretty good mix of information available to the public.

Q135 **Grahame Morris:** Can you make directions to the operator or strongly suggest that, as a matter of course the operators seek to do this? Obviously there are some circumstances when they could not comply.

Derek Fishpool: We have a very good working relationship with our main commercial operator in the area, which is Stagecoach. We have regular meetings with them. These sorts of issues are discussed and plans are jointly worked out to improve things wherever we can.

Q136 **Chair:** If I came on a train to Plymouth, jumped off at the railway station and went to the nearest bus stop, would I be able to see what the bus network in Plymouth looks like irrespective of operator? Would I know when I could expect a bus to get me to wherever I was hoping to go?

Ralph Ellis: Yes, you can. There are three bus stops adjacent to the railway station. They all have timetables. One has real-time information for the outbound services. They all have shelters. Shelters are provided by an outside contractor called JCDecaux. Apart from the shelters, the city council provides the timetable cases at bus stops. The bus operators fill those cases with their timetables. If there is more than one operator then we provide two cases so they do not clash with each other. Both operators—Stagecoach and Plymouth Citybus—do produce proper printed timetables for their own services and for those they operate on my behalf, and we provide an online map.

Q137 **Chair:** For each of you, very briefly, if you were a visitor to one of your



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cities or towns, is it easy to use the bus? Is it good enough?

Ralph Ellis: Yes.

Derek Fishpool: Yes, and we do receive a lot of compliments from visitors as to how good the services are and the information available.

Jason Humm: Yes, but there is always more that we can do. Provision of information is critical and we know, based on the percentage usage of buses, it is not the size it could be. We are doing okay but we can do better.

Q138 **Chair:** We only have 15 minutes left but there are some really important issues that I am going to turn to Daniel to ask you questions about, the relationship between transport and planning and also—as you might have anticipated—we want to talk about the place of franchising and other powers.

Daniel Zeichner: I am astonished to hear you say you think it is easy for people visiting places to use buses. That is not my experience anywhere. Frankly, if you put yourself in the position of the visitor going to places I do not think it is like that.

I know none of you are planners but Jason did touch on this earlier—the relationship between the right transport infrastructure in new housing and industrial developments. In complicated local government structures, with multi-tier local government, do you think it is sufficiently joined up to produce the right kind of outcome at the moment?

Tim Bowles: Earlier on we touched on working as a region, how we have been working as a region in the past and our role as a combined authority to take that on and move that forward. Part of that work has been around our spatial plan, which is identifying residential and business opportunities over the next 20 years. We have made sure that—and it is critical that it is—it is supported by the joint transport plan we are talking about, which is addressing different mode options to our new developments. That is vitally important from our perspective; it has to be addressing various different modes. From our perspective on a regional strategic basis, yes, we are sufficiently joined up. I know the local authorities who are behind that, who are the planning authorities, see that as a vital aspect of how those developments come forward. That is the very quick answer.

With regard to your earlier question, yes, I do think we have to do better in terms of information. You touched on visitors—we have a very, very vibrant tourism economy in the region so you are right, it is vital that we are constantly able to keep addressing those needs. For us that is really important. Whatever we have is never good enough and we have to do better with that information.

Daniel Zeichner: It is not a criticism of you; it is the same everywhere in my experience.



Tim Bowles: I wanted to make the point that we are not complacent.

Q139 **Daniel Zeichner:** Are you confident we are not going to have more housing developments without transport?

Derek Fishpool: What we are starting to find is that developers are desperately trying to reduce the amount they want to contribute to the 106 money, particularly as the financial situation has become more difficult. The 106 money is also being competed against, not just for perhaps a bus service but for road infrastructure to that development. It does have its challenges but we do work very closely with our planning people and we are involved, usually from a very early stage.

Q140 **Daniel Zeichner:** Can you tell them not to do it if the transport is not good enough?

Derek Fishpool: We can suggest.

Ralph Ellis: Our planning team is on the same floor as us at the city council so they do keep in contact with us. Where there is something we think is going to be of interest or concern to the operators we take it to the operators—we have the Plymouth Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership, BPPI—and seek their views, concerns and so on.

Talking about 106, we have just started a new service in Sherford, a new town. We have been able to work with Stagecoach and have given a new estate a service every 20 minutes. Earlier on we talked about the chicken and egg situation; in this case it has worked and we have been able to use the 106 money to provide a service into a new town. There is a very small number of people there at the moment but they have a bus every 20 minutes Monday to Saturday and hourly evenings and Sundays.

Daniel Zeichner: Very good.

Ralph Ellis: It is very good. People going to Sherford cannot say they do not have a bus service; there it is, every 20 minutes.

Q141 **Daniel Zeichner:** You will be aware the Bus Services Act last year created some new powers. Have you looked at franchising; have you considered it?

Tim Bowles: The key here is our bus strategy. Our bus strategy will inform what we see as the future, the way in which bus services will develop and integrate with other services across the region. From our perspective we will use the bus strategy to form what those networks need to look like and how those operations need to come into place. What we then look at in terms of how that operation will take place, will fall on the back of that.

I am really interested to explore lots of options. We have quality partnerships that we are rolling out and that we have in operation as well. From our perspective, it is important we investigate all of the options and find the right options for what we need to see developing. I



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am not saying we are ruling that out, but we need to make sure we look at it properly in the context of the overall strategy and how it could fit as part of any quality partnerships.

Q142 Daniel Zeichner: Is there anything you think franchising could give you that you do not have at the moment?

Tim Bowles: It is important to look at what we need. As lots of people tell me anecdotally, if we take London out of the equation there is not another city or city region in the country where it has been successful. I do not eliminate it based purely on that anecdotal aspect; it is a case of looking at what we would need to have within those partnership arrangements. That is why we want to look at what we call quality partnerships. How we would then use a vehicle to deliver that would be the next question.

Q143 Daniel Zeichner: We will go on to partnerships in a second. Obviously there are not any other examples because no one has yet managed to do it elsewhere in the country.

Supposing you wanted to ensure evening services, early services or weekend services that the operator chose not to do for commercial reasons, how could you do that if it was not going to be through franchising?

Tim Bowles: That goes back to the nature of the partnership you have in place. We are already looking at that and working on those sorts of models with our mass rapid transport system around MetroBus, so there are ways we could look at doing it. However, you are right, it is looking at what we need as a region that is the fundamental aspect. It is doing that process, that research and that work first and then finding the vehicle to deliver.

Q144 Daniel Zeichner: Could you tell us a bit about the partnerships you have and what you think their strengths are?

Tim Bowles: This is on the basis of more information, based around our MetroBus arrangements.

Chair: It will be great if you can be as succinct as possible.

Jason Humm: The gap you spoke about is around data and the viability of a particular route or particular extension into the evening and where your people are travelling. Franchising would give you those elements, which are critical for planning your strategy. The relationship we have with First Bus is very positive and we work jointly on investment in the network and investment in their fleet. There are always early discussions in terms of the routes that are doing well and the routes that are struggling a little bit. Some of the timescales in terms of where a route is cancelled are tight and difficult to cope with but certainly our early involvement with the operator helps to mitigate any risks associated with that.



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Q145 **Daniel Zeichner:** I came here a couple of years ago to see the MetroBus routes being built. I think I was standing on a bit of road, which is now finished, but that does not have a bus route on it because you cannot find an operator to commercially run it. Is that not exactly the problem? What can you do about that under the current system with a partnership approach?

Jason Humm: It is a challenge because—

Daniel Zeichner: It is a challenge—there is no bus there.

Jason Humm: There is not a bus there. For every example we have of a difficult situation like that, we have lots of positives in terms of where we have really worked well in that partnership and we have been able to get bus numbers in line with the increases we have seen.

You are absolutely right, if you are doing a significant investment in capital infrastructure, franchising would be able to guarantee that a route will go down that particular—

Q146 **Daniel Zeichner:** Is it not a strange situation where you have public money being put into a piece of infrastructure and then have a situation where you cannot run a service on it under the current situation?

Jason Humm: I absolutely accept that is not an ideal situation.

Daniel Zeichner: I am not blaming you.

Jason Humm: Thank you. What we also know is that franchising is relatively new in terms of that legislation. It has not been enacted yet. There is some cautiousness to make sure that what is looked into is going to be viable for each region. We are part of the Urban Transport Group. We are also part of the eight combined authorities and we do share a lot of transport information between us around those elements of best practice, where we might want to move to and also some of the challenges and risks that are involved with a major decision in terms of what the combined authority would be taking on.

We recognise it is good legislation and gives that option but exactly how we use it to best benefit, as Mayor Bowles said, is something we are trying to do some work on throughout the strategy.

Q147 **Daniel Zeichner:** Derek, how useful have the partnership approaches been?

Derek Fishpool: We work well with our operators. Additional journeys can always be purchased through our tendering system but it is all back to having the funding to be able to do that.

Q148 **Daniel Zeichner:** Do you have much money left to do it?

Derek Fishpool: We never have enough.

Q149 **Daniel Zeichner:** There is never enough. The funding decline has gone



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off a cliff nationally. We have whole swathes of the country where there is no support going in at all.

Derek Fishpool: No and, as I said earlier, we have been very well supported by our members. We are still currently supporting about £7 million worth of services, about £1 million of which is from 106 money going in. However, as I said, in rural areas the cost is quite exorbitant.

Q150 **Daniel Zeichner:** How about Plymouth?

Ralph Ellis: Our supported services budget has remained fairly constant over the years. It is obviously nowhere the same as Derek's at Devon; ours is roughly about a third of a million pounds. The money remains the same but each time we go for a round of tendering the money buys a little less.

We have been very fortunate over the years with Sunday trading. In the past the city council used to support a network of Sunday buses. Sunday daytime is now commercial. We do not support anything at all on a Sunday now. Our main supported services are now Monday to Friday between 9.30 am and 6 pm, with one or two exceptions. If we wanted more Sunday buses or more evening buses I am sure either Citybus or Stagecoach would be only too happy to quote but, as Derek said, it is having the money—whether it is partnership, franchising or anything.

Q151 **Daniel Zeichner:** Tendering and supporting non-commercial service is one thing and quality partnerships is another, obviously designed to try to come to a deal with private operators to improve services. Do you use those?

Ralph Ellis: No, ours are informal partnerships.

Q152 **Chair:** We are nearing the end now so you can relax a little bit. One of the issues we have just started touching on is funding, which is key. One of the impacts of that is on the ability of authorities to partly get funding but also to make use of it.

In written evidence we heard from Telford and Wrekin Council and they told us they do not have the capital or the revenue funding resources available to bring forward investment, innovation and best practice in the bus network. Is that something you recognise? We have already heard about the impact funding cuts have had on supported services. What impact have funding cuts had on your transport planning functions and your ability to bid and spend the resources that are available?

Derek Fishpool: In the last five or six years we have had two rounds of service reductions due to funding cutbacks. We have not done anything for the last three years, we have managed to hold it fairly steady. However, it obviously does have an effect. We have lost services and frequencies, particularly in the more rural areas, because of a lack of funding. The funding reduction from central Government has had that impact on bus services in Devon.



Q153 **Chair:** Karen, is there anything you want to add from your perspective around the impact of budget cuts?

Karen Rose: Likewise, we have tried to maintain our existing grant support for community transport. Obviously the biggest pressure on schemes at the moment is the uncertainty regarding the legislative changes with the EU regulations. In the meantime we have managed to maintain support for services. Our biggest challenge is what happens beyond where we are at the moment.

Q154 **Chair:** I am sure you know that was the subject of the first inquiry of the Select Committee. Ralph, what is the position in Plymouth around the impact of cuts to local authority funding?

Ralph Ellis: We have had some successes with major schemes. Our major planning teams have delivered one or two really big schemes lately—the Derriford Transport scheme, the work on the Forder Valley Link Road scheme—and delivered the East End scheme back in 2010. In regards to capital projects, we have been very successful. We are one of the 10 successful authorities for the Transforming Cities Fund where there is up to £100 million at stake—fingers crossed we will be successful there.

As regards revenue with the tendered services, it has remained fairly constant. It buys a little less each time but we have managed to prioritise Monday to Friday services aimed at schools, doctors and hospitals and I think it meets what it should be meeting. We could do more. We lost all our Saturday services back in 2009-10 when the budget was cut last time, but since then it has remained fairly constant. We have lost a few early mornings and a few late evenings but on the whole we have been able to maintain the network. In the last network round of tendering we had a very good response from both Citybus and Stagecoach. Based on the response from Stagecoach we were able to increase the network and have gone into a couple of new estates.

Q155 **Chair:** Tim, I am going to give you the last word on this. As a Metro Mayor perhaps you are in a slightly better position than many local transport authorities. Have you had people use that money wisely when it has been allocated to the area?

Tim Bowles: We will go back, if I may, to the start and I will come onto that. A little earlier I touched on having those tools and levers. Clearly as a combined authority one of the things we have is a small amount of revenue and capital—"direct gain share" as it is referred to. We look at ways in which we can use elements of that, bearing in mind we have many other calls on that funding.

The other important aspect for us and the way we are working as a region is our relationship with our LEP because within that there are various different funding streams around LGF and so on. They have been major contributors to a lot of the capital work that has gone on. As we



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are the operational aspect of the LEP, I know we will keep working within that.

Ralph has touched on the Transforming Cities Fund. Again, as a combined authority we have seen an awful lot of investment come into the region on that. Our Transforming Cities Fund will be used for delivering parts of the joint transport plan, so we will be looking at how we can use some elements of that around bus services. We see it as quite a significant mix.

The other thing we touched on earlier is how the relationship works with the local authorities, who are the planning authorities, around 106, CIL and those other things. The really important thing is that we are working as a region to identify those different streams, trying to work on how we build funding around that and making sure we are working across all of those borders and funding streams.

Chair: I am afraid time has defeated us. It is amazing how quickly an hour and a half can pass by when we are talking buses. I am sure there are many more questions we would have liked to ask but I am afraid we are out of time. We may write to you with requests for further information if we feel there are bits we have missed.

Thank you very much for giving evidence today. That concludes our public session.