

Summary of Decision letter and Inspector's Report

Introduction

The public inquiry into the AVTM scheme was held between the 22nd May and the 4th July 2012. The Inspector's report was released by the Department for Transport on 6th November 2013, accompanying a letter from the Department for Transport (DfT) to Bircham Dyson Bell, confirming the decision of the Secretary of State to make the Transport and Works Act (TWA) order as recommended by the Inspector.

The Decision Letter – Key Points

- 1) The Order authorises the Promoters to construct and operate a guided bus-way system between the Long Ashton Park and Ride site and Prince Street Bridge.
- 2) The Secretary of State acknowledges an alternative route via Cumberland Road and Redcliff Hill has been adopted by the Promoters following the Bristol Review, and has considered whether it is appropriate to continue to determine the Order application as submitted. He has concluded that the revisions require planning permission and possible land acquisition, but that it would be reasonable for him to determine the Order application as it stands, and the Promoters do not need to implement all the powers in the Order as long as these consents are obtained.
- 3) The Secretary of State has “weighed up the benefits of the AVTM scheme (as considered at the inquiry) against the adverse effects.....has concluded that the transportation and socio-economic benefits of the scheme clearly outweigh the harm that would be caused to heritage assets and the impacts which some residents and other users of the area would suffer.”
- 4) The Secretary of State agrees that:
 - the scheme is consistent with national and local policy, its objectives are relevant and worth pursuing;
 - there would be a major beneficial impact on bus services, with significant savings in journey times from the Park & Ride site and patronage will be significantly increased, with the potential to serve a much wider community in North Somerset;
 - future interchange improvements at Temple Meads and alongside the re-opened Portishead line would be worthwhile;
 - the city centre bus priority proposals are essential and highly beneficial;
 - the Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) is representative and very good value for money;
 - neither the alternative routes nor technologies assessed by the promoters were preferable to the proposed scheme;
 - There would be a noticeable increase in noise for users of the Chocolate Path and some local residents, but the scheme would probably improve air quality overall although the standard of buses using the route would be a critical factor;

- Landscape and visual amenity impact would be largely offset by proposed mitigation works. Harm to heritage waterfront asset would be 'less than substantial', and outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme;
- the order provides the necessary powers notwithstanding the outcome of the Town or Village Green application;
- He does "not share the view that the interests of pedestrians and cyclists have not been treated seriously" – and notes that some significant enhancements for pedestrians and cyclists are included in the proposals;
- He agrees with the inspector that a detailed assessment of the parking needs of residents on Cumberland Road should be undertaken.

5) There is a 42 days challenge period to the order notification.

Additional Points from The Inspector's Report

The report is substantial (over 200 pages) and outlines in detail the case for the Promoters of and objectors to the Order. The inspector's conclusions (over 70 pages) include the following points:

- 1) The scheme will generally accord with its objectives.
- 2) The use of the route by buses from North Somerset is very beneficial and important if the scheme is to meet its wider objectives. First have indicated its desire to do so.
- 3) The core BRT service will be a major uplift and there is every prospect this would significantly increase passenger numbers.
- 4) The city centre works are an essential part of the scheme and have benefits for other bus services.
- 5) Overall, forecast journey time savings are soundly based, taking account of the level of segregation provided.
- 6) A roll out of the Residents Parking Programme is likely to significantly increase patronage, even though its impact was not included in the transport model.
- 7) The cost estimate seems reasonable and any future increases would be unlikely to impact on the viability of the scheme. There is a reasonable prospect of funding being available.
- 8) Whilst the proposed stop at Temple Circus is not ideally located to serve rail passengers, the subsequent relocation of this stop following clarity on Enterprise Zone plans seems sensible.
- 9) Guide-way operation seems practical and operation should be comfortable for passengers.
- 10) The inspector accepted the robustness of the modelling and economic assessment and noted the extent of sensitivity testing undertaken in coming to this view. The objectors' specific criticisms of the modelling were insufficient to challenge this view.
- 11) The choice of technology has been subject to considerable study over an extended period. The choice of a bus-based mode is sound, as is the Promoter's cost estimate for Ultra Light Rail.
- 12) The scheme is consistent with national policy and strongly supported by local policy.
- 13) It will be very important to ensure that the vehicles are high quality and low emission. Careful consideration of standards for services from North Somerset will be necessary.
- 14) The impact of the scheme on air quality and greenhouse gas emissions should be positive.

- 15) There are some adverse impacts in conservation areas particularly Harbourside and the Chocolate Path, which are weighed against the public benefits of the scheme in the inspector's overall conclusions.
- 16) The opportunities for walking and cycling would not be worse as a result of the scheme and in many respects would be enhanced.
- 17) The three metre width for the maintenance track is acceptable. Its designation as a Public Right of Way should be considered.
- 18) The proposed arrangements for Prince Street Bridge are acceptable.
- 19) The refurbishment of Ashton Avenue bridge and the provision of a wider and better surface for pedestrians and cyclists would be of significant benefit. The Avon Crescent pedestrian/cycle link will be a major benefit.
- 20) A connection between the CONNECT2 scheme from Long Ashton to Festival Way and the maintenance track appears feasible and beneficial, and should be considered by North Somerset Council.
- 21) A more detailed assessment of parking impact on Cumberland Road is recommended.
- 22) The environmental statement submitted with the TWA application is comprehensive.
- 23) Overall, the case for making the Order is compelling and in the public interest.