

Question from BOPF Open Forum at Triodos Foundation, Thursday 11 December 2025,  
10:30 - 12:30

## **Questions for Helen Godwin - Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority**

### **Buses and Bus Services**

#### **Access and Routes**

##### Why are there **no direct bus routes from East Bristol to Southmead Hospital?**

I know how important it is to be able to get to and from Southmead Hospital. As most bus services are radial routes that journey into, or through, the city centre, Southmead has unfortunately not been as well served as these central routes.

There are a couple of bus services that directly connect East Bristol with Southmead Hospital: Service 17 operates between Keynsham and Bristol City Centre via Kingswood, Soundwell, Staple Hill, Fishponds and Eastville. Service 24 operates between Ashton Vale and Southmead Hospital via Easton and Eastville. For those areas of East Bristol, and indeed other areas of the city, that do not have a direct bus service to Southmead Hospital, it is necessary to change buses in Bristol City Centre.

As the vast majority of bus services in Bristol are operated on a commercial basis by First and are not under the control of the Mayoral Combined Authority, we don't have full control over setting the routes. However, I'm determined to improve this, and we have plans to reform our bus system, which you'll soon be able to read about in our Transport Vision and Bus Plan.

##### Why have bus services to the **outskirts of Bristol**, including Tudor Road, been cut?

As above, as most services are commercially run, the decision to remove a service is ultimately made by the provider. We have some funding to support routes that would have otherwise been cut, but this is limited, which means that unfortunately, we can't fund all the routes that we might wish to.

There are a number of reasons that a provider may cut a service, for example, a large reduction in passenger numbers and lower demand. At the same time, there has been continued pressure on our budgets, meaning that it's been difficult to plug all the gaps in the network where services have been withdrawn, or to restore frequencies where they have been reduced.

It's not necessarily the case that the outer areas of Bristol have suffered more cutbacks than the inner areas, but the impact may be greater in the outer areas of the city due there being fewer services on a given road or corridor. We want to make sure that all areas of the city are served by our bus network, so we'll look to factor in the needs of those living on the outskirts of the city as we work on reforming our bus system.

Why do residents in **Cotham and Redland** now need two buses to reach Broadmead or local shopping areas?

The corridors of Whiteladies Road & Gloucester Road are the main arteries into Bristol city centre from the north of the city, and in addition to residential areas either side of these roads, they are lined with multiple shops, cafes, restaurants and other facilities. This generates a lot of patronage making them ideal corridors, along with their directness to the city centre, for routing bus services along.

The predominantly residential areas between these two corridors, notably Redland and Cotham, don't lend them quite so readily to generating bus patronage due to fewer trip attractors and some challenging topography. This means that bus providers would have designed their routes and frequencies with this in mind on a commercial basis.

Why does the **UWE bus only run once an hour** for residents, not just students?

I'm afraid I can't answer this fully without knowing which UWE bus you're referring to. In general, most buses are open to all members of the public. Most services are provided commercially and therefore the level of frequency is determined by the bus operator. There are a few services contracted by University of Bristol who would therefore set the frequency, one being the U2 Weston-Super-Mare to Bristol service which passes the Bower Ashton Campus.

Why was the old **No. 9 bus route** removed, and is there any plan to reinstate an equivalent service?

Service 9 was operated by First, like many bus services in the West of England area. It was a commercial decision by First to cease operation of this service, and this is likely to have been because of lower patronage and alternative bus services being available.

The Combined Authority has no control over commercially operated services, but we have lots of plans for reforming our bus service to make sure that the most important routes are protected. We will soon publish our Bus Plan which outlines our plans for the regions' bus network and we have received a multi-year settlement of over £42m for our buses.

## **Frequency and Reliability**

### Why are buses so infrequent (often once an hour) in central residential areas with high numbers of older residents?

It's difficult to provide a comprehensive answer without details about the residential area you're referring to. The local bus network within the region is comprised largely of services provided on a commercial basis with some services classed as "socially necessary" supported services which are provided with financial support from us and the Councils. The provision of both commercial and supported services is primarily guided by the demand for bus services.

In many residential areas, including central areas, patronage may be lower outside of peak hours which will have a commercial impact for the operator and as a result service frequency may be reduced. In central areas, there also tends to be a greater option of bus services available for the travelling public and there may be alternative services which may be utilised.

If there is a specific area or service of concern, please provide further details so that the provision of bus services in the area may be reviewed when future funding becomes available.

### What action is being taken to address **cancellations and worsening reliability**, which disproportionately affect older people?

It's the responsibility of local bus operators to schedule services, taking into consideration prevailing traffic conditions to ensure that they are reliable at different times of day/day of the week. However, at times maintaining reliability can be challenging and as a result, services can be delayed and cancelled as a result of severe traffic congestion, road traffic incidents and less frequently special events.

I always hear from residents about how an unreliable service affects their lives, so we want to make sure that we're listening to feedback about what works and what doesn't.

The Combined Authority, in partnership with unitary authorities, is currently delivering infrastructure improvements across the region to benefit bus services through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Further details of this can be found at [Bus Service Improvement Plan - West of England Combined Authority](#)

### How will WECA reduce the need for older people to rely on expensive taxis due to poor bus services?

Much of the Combined Authority is well served by local bus services with frequencies of less than ten minutes throughout the day Monday to Friday, while some areas, particularly more rural areas, are less well served.

The local bus network combines mainly services provided on a commercial basis, while some areas are supplemented by services provided with financial support by the Combined Authority and Councils. These services are classified as 'socially necessary' services.

Demand for services primarily guides the provision of commercial services, and socially necessary services, funding permitting, is used to fill gaps in the bus network and provide new services, sometimes on a trial basis, becoming more permanent if patronage justifies the continuation of the service/s. However, financial support is limited and therefore resources have to be allocated to areas in line with potential demand in order to ensure efficient use of limited financial resources. If you have a specific geographical area of concern, then please provide details, so I can feed this back to my officers.

### **Accessibility and Design**

#### **Why do the newer electric buses have reduced wheelchair and buggy space?**

The new electric buses maintain one designated wheelchair/buggy space, which is the same amount of space as the diesel buses they're replacing. This amount of designated space meets the standard of our enhanced partnership with operators, and Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations enshrined in UK law.

#### **Has consideration been given to bus colour schemes to support people with sight loss (e.g. consistent colours by route)?**

Route colours are not currently among the measures being discussed through the West of England Enhanced Partnership. However, the Combined Authority works with operators to improve the accessibility of services, which can include audio announcements and disability awareness training for staff, who can support passengers with additional needs.

We always welcome suggestions that may help improve accessibility as we want everyone to be able to use our buses. We will feed back your suggestion about colour routes/schemes when discussing accessibility with our operators and partners.

#### **Can WECA specify that city buses must have two sets of doors?**

The specific vehicle requirements agreed with bus operators are set out in the West of England Enhanced Partnership. Current requirements include emission standards; audio visual equipment; ticketing and payment equipment. Other vehicle specifications are set by operators based on commercial and operational requirements.

The Enhanced Partnership is currently being reviewed and there is potential for additional vehicle requirements to be agreed and specified, so we'll take your comments on board.

However, operators have fed back their concerns around two door vehicles, which are namely that they are more expensive to operate, reduce passenger capacity, and have increased maintenance issues due to the additional doors.

Where buses already have middle doors, will drivers be trained to open them routinely and passengers encouraged to exit through them to reduce stop delays?

Drivers are provided with training on all vehicle types, including those with dual doors. I will ask my officers to contact First bus to ensure that the drivers are utilising both sets of doors.

### **Information**

Where can residents obtain **printed bus timetables and transport pamphlets**, especially those who do not use smartphones?

Copies of printed timetables can always be requested by emailing [transport.operations@westofengland-ca.gov.uk](mailto:transport.operations@westofengland-ca.gov.uk). Additionally, South Gloucestershire libraries carry stock of the most popular routes nearby them. Travel guides are also usually stocked at local libraries and bus stations, but printed copies can always be requested at <https://travelwest.info/bus/network-maps/>

### **Rail**

Has the **electrification of the rail line from Swindon** been cancelled, and if so, why?

A large proportion of the railway line between Bristol and Swindon is electrified already (electrified lines are shown in GREEN in the diagram below). This was delivered under Great Western Electrification, which was a government funded project. The overhead electrification work, which ended in the 2010's due to escalating costs, stopped short of Bristol – it ends at Bristol Parkway and Chippenham.

The Combined Authority is funding a project looking at the case and infrastructure requirements for extending the electrification south of Bristol Parkway towards Bristol, with the aspiration of installing sufficient overhead electrification to be being able to operate battery electric trains across our regional branch line rail network. Further funding is currently being considered from Transport for City Regions to further development this project over the next 12-18 months.

A future phase of that project could look at the case and infrastructure requirements to extend electrification beyond Chippenham towards Bristol.

## Employment and Older Workers

What support will WECA offer to help **older people remain in or re-enter the labour market**, including:

- Age-friendly employers
- Career advice
- Practical help accessing suitable work?

The Combined Authority funds a range of services which support older people to re-enter the labour market.

Firstly [Skills Connect](#) is our “one access” point for all residents looking for help with employability whether they are in or out of work. It’s a one stop shop and it allows for self-service through the website, or people can direct themselves or be directed through the “**Speak To Us**” digital form or phonenumber to access support locally from teams and specialist coaches within our Local Authorities.

Based on the individual’s needs, they may receive employability support direct from these teams from a Skills Connect Coach or be triaged into more specialist support. This specialist support could include one of our own MCA funded initiatives or wider provision funded regionally. It is always the intention that residents get to the most suitable provision and support for their needs as quickly as possible and if their circumstances change they can reconnect in with Skills Connect at any point.

Below are some other schemes that may be of use to older people:

- **Future Bright** will support residents in work who are looking to progress with personalised career coaching to help individuals achieve their goals.
- **Skills Connect** coaches will offer tailored employability support to any resident out of work looking for support related to skills and employability.
- **Connect to Work** is a more specialised service working with people with disabilities or health conditions to get into or remain in work through a proven model called Supported Employment. Employment Specialist Coaches support individuals through vocational profiling to be placed in paid employment (including apprenticeships) quickly and support them and their employer to maintain them in work. This service works closely with the employer as well as the participant to support the individuals needs and reasonable adjustments to help them thrive in work. This programme is initiating slowly and will be open for referrals from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.
- **Work Well** will support people with various health issues struggling to remain in work or getting into work. The support is less intensive than Connect to Work and therefore can be a more suitable option for some residents.

## **Housing and Infrastructure**

How will you ensure that new housing, particularly so-called “**affordable housing**”, is of a genuinely liveable size and quality rather than “rabbit hutches”?

The size of new housing is a matter for Councils. Each of their Local Plans will set out requirements on size/quality, which must at least be in line with the government's minimum space standards.

Is it reasonable to expect **older people with large homes and furniture to downsize into small flats**?

WECA does not mandate downsizing and we would not tell anyone to move homes or downsize. We're working with the unitary authorities and Homes England as part of our Strategic Place Partnership to ensure that housing development meets the full needs of the region, including delivery of different types and tenure of housing. That means ensuring that older people have the option to downsize, if they think that is suitable for them.

However, when downsizing works for the person or families' situation, it can free up larger homes for families without the need to build additional homes, particularly in areas where there is a lack of suitable land and/or space to build on. There is a real lack of larger homes available for those on social housing waiting lists; our past research has shown that in Bath, a wait for a 4-bed social home could exceed 200 years.

How will older people be **involved from the start** in the design and location of new **affordable housing**?

It's absolutely critical that we have significant community engagement as part of the regeneration programmes. We're currently consulting on our plans for St Philips Marsh and want to hear from as many different people as possible. Community drop-in sessions include:

- Wednesday 4 February 2026 4-7pm, Asda Bedminster, East St, Bristol BS3 4JY
- Monday 9 February 2026 4-7pm, Sainsbury's Avonmeads, Saint Philips Causeway, Bristol BS4 3BD
- Wednesday 11 February 2026 3-6pm, Tesco Totterdown, 33 Oxford St, Bristol BS3 4RJ
- Thursday 19 February 2026 2.30-6.30pm, Safe 'Ouse, The Dings, Oxford Street, Bristol, BS2 0QR

We are also starting to think about the delivery of our Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). It will consider how we build the right homes in the right places, what roads, schools and hospitals might be needed, how to support local jobs and businesses, and how to protect nature and prepare for climate change. This plan will help shape more detailed Local Plans later on, and will be used in future when decisions are made about new projects.

We have publicly committed to engaging publicly on the SDS with the public this Autumn/Winter, with a further consultation planned for late 2027.

## **Transport Infrastructure**

Will WECA fund the reversal or restoration of transport schemes paid for by previous mayors that:

- were unpopular locally
- have never been used as intended (e.g. road narrowing for cycle lanes)?

All transport schemes which have come forward as part of the CRSTS programme have followed the agreed processes set out in our Local Growth Assurance Framework and have followed DfT's funding conditions for this programme.

If there is a particular scheme that you would like to query, I would be happy to ask my officers to look into it, but I would need some more information and context about the scheme.