

Failings of the consultation process for the South Bristol Link Phases 1&2

In its Best and Final Bid (BAFB) the West of England Partnership relies (as evidence of consultation) on consultations undertaken in 2004 – 2006 to develop the Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study (GBSTS) and statutory consultations undertaken for the Local Plans and Core Strategies. It also relies on wider consultations in 2008 and 2009 in combination with BRT schemes.

There has never been any consultation specifically on the South Bristol Link (SBL) road. The last consultation that included the road as an element was in 2009.

Confusion over the road element of the scheme

This scheme has become quite confusing as it is now combined with a Bus Rapid Transit scheme (BRT).

Previously called the South Bristol Link Road, the word 'road' in the title of the scheme was dropped by local councils back in 2008, when stage 3 of the road was dropped due to strong public opposition.

The scheme is now being portrayed to the public as part of a BRT network. This combination has had the affect of obscuring the road scheme and leaving local people confused about what is proposed. The South Bristol Link itself has not been consulted on as a separate scheme.

Lack of clarity

Since the road was first proposed, West of England Partnership's maps on its website and in leaflets have been small and without sufficient detail to work out the exact route or dimensions of the road and BRT.

Only in September 2011, when the BAFB was published, have detailed drawings been published on the West of England Partnership website, enabling local residents to begin to work out how close to local housing the road runs, how much Common land it takes, how many brooks, hedges and footpaths will be destroyed by the road, its impact on the rail line, etc.

Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study (GBSTS)

At this stage of public consultation on this cross West of England region study, road and public transport schemes for the next 20 years were only lines on an artist's drawing of the whole of the West of England.

The public were invited to comment on the general principles of schemes and there was strong support for trams, although local councils were subsequently told there was no policy support for trams in Government.

Local councils proceeded with Bus Rapid Transit instead. Most road proposals were subsequently dropped by local councils. Due to the sheer length of time that has elapsed between the emergence of this scheme in the GBSTS study and now, many local residents believe that the road proposal has gone away.

2008 – 2009 consultations

The 2008 – 2009 consultation was in combination with two Rapid Transit schemes. This consultation presented the SBL road as a fixed element with no opportunity to examine alternatives. It was primarily an examination of different routes for the road. More people voted for 'do nothing' or suggested alternative public transport options than supported the road.

The November 2009 consultation took the scheme as a fixed element, in preparation for the 2010 Major Scheme bid to DfT.

The Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance (an alliance of local transport and environmental groups) organised a postcard campaign in January 2010 asking the Partnership to drop the South Bristol Link and fund the reopening of Portishead rail line instead.

There is strong local support for reopening of local rail lines with improved bus/rail interchange for South Bristol. **Over 1000 postcards were sent to local councils by local residents asking them to drop the road scheme.** In the BAFB there is no mention of the postcard campaign or the scale of this opposition.

2011 meetings

In July / August 2011 the Neighbourhood Planning Network (NPN) – a local residents' grouping – organised two joint BRT3/SBL meetings in Filwood, which is an area not affected by the South Bristol Link or on its route.

Organisers invited officers from North Somerset and the scheme consultants Mott McDonald to come along. No meetings or consultations were organised separately by the West of England Partnership or local councils themselves. There was no publicity by the promoters or the NPN about these two meetings for local residents living along the route. The NPN advertised the meeting to representatives within their own network and to those who had participated in past BRT3 meetings.

The meetings were ostensibly about the BRT, with the SBL tagged on. There has been no consultation in North Somerset (the Green Belt section of the road).

Letters were sent to local residents along the route in August informing them of the intention to proceed with an application for Government funding and that workmen will be seen drilling in the road. This is obviously not a consultation.

Local representatives inform Campaign for Better Transport that leaflets were produced in August 2011 dealing with all three BRT schemes and a short list of the changes made to each. The map on it did not even have the SBL road on the key. There was simply a dotted line on the map with no key. The leaflet was not distributed to residents along the route or generally in the affected area only to a small number of people who had identified themselves as stakeholders back in 2009.

Stakeholder Management Plan

The Rapid Transit Network Stakeholder Management Plan appended to the BAFB does not mention 'the public' and simply discusses how to promote the schemes to business and politicians, and how to garner support for the schemes.

South Bristol Link Scheme Consultation Report

This report (Appendix A of the BAFB)¹ restates the history of consultation regarding the scheme that is included in the BAFB. It does not add anything, and we share the same concerns as above.

¹ South Bristol Link Scheme Consultation Report, February 2010
<http://travelplus.org.uk/media/222995/woe%20sbl%20appx%20a%20report%20of%20consultation.pdf>