

TRANSPORT

Joint Local Transport Plan

The draft document shows clearly that government funding limits will scupper the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) which was necessary to improve air quality to meet national health guidelines, and have been given public approval through the consultation process. Poor air quality is a matter of major public concern. Bristol's Climate Protection and Sustainable Energy Strategy is also probably scuppered. Both this and the AQAP emphasised the need for requisite measures to be incorporated into the Joint Local Transport Plan.

The draft plan shows that the council is under opposing pressures between public demand, together with environmental requirements, and central government financial constraints. Bristol, along with many other cities, is the victim of dispute between two government departments, namely Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which drives environmental policy and the Department for Transport which holds the purse strings. Can our MPs do anything about this?

Road User Charging

Road user charging is likely to be a major topic for debate for some time. The impasse is that road user charging is needed to finance public transport improvements but cannot be implemented before such improvements. As least funding is being sought by the Council to see how this impasse can be overcome.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The future of the Green Belt is threatened by the need to build 100,000 homes in the sub-region. The impact of this and of the airport expansion on Bristol's transport system could be horrendous unless sustainable planning principles are adhered to. The need to provide more homes could be turned to advantage if development was planned within the city or close to existing or planned public transport nodes. This would minimise the influx of traffic and increase the viability of public transport. This would require the investment to be diverted from provision of new roads towards improving public transport unless additional funding becomes available. The South East Regional Assembly is insisting that the envisaged increase in its population cannot be accepted without a massive investment in transport infrastructure.

Airport Expansion

Strong arguments against expansion are being presented to the group by Pip Sheard, who campaigns on environmental matters. Airport

expansion would result in increased noise and CO₂ emissions from aircraft, loss of greenfield land to provide additional space and the inevitable increase in access traffic. Economic arguments for expansion have been weakened by the suggestion that air traffic is mainly outward tourism and thus a net loss to the region's economy. If the days of cheap air travel are numbered by rising fuel prices, will the airport expansion be necessary anyway?

The Buses

Buses are flavour of the month with the Department of Transport and seem to be playing an increasingly important role in moving people in London, where regulation persists and funding flows. The situation in 'the provinces' is quite different. Bus services operate commercially without regulation which generally results in poor, unreliable services.



The Transport Plan does provide *Why are we waiting?*

for some improvement in the form of 'showcase' services which should be supported. The question is whether this will be sufficient to attract car users so as to meet safety, air quality and climate protection objectives. There is little scope for optimism here.



Shared Space

The group is discussing the concept of shared space being promoted by the Living Streets group. In shared space, no one has priority. Traffic is constrained and managed to maximise safety for all. It works well in Germany and Holland: How about Bristol?

Correspondence

This column attracts considerable correspondence from readers which could well be published here. I would like to quote from one reader who pointed out that Bristol lost out on the City of Culture bid partly because the judges commented on how divided the city was. Without an effective public transport system Bristol will remain a group of disconnected neighbourhoods surrounding an unhealthy centre.

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