

## **The House of Commons South West Regional Committee's Report** **Transport in the South West**

[Transport in the South West](#), a report from the House of Commons South West Regional Committee, was published in two volumes in February 2010. The report itself is contained in volume 1; volume 2 contains the evidence received by the Committee, including a submission from FOSBR (see pp. 181–4).

It is encouraging that the Committee recommends that local transport schemes should agree more fully with the aims of the Government's policy paper [Delivering a Sustainable Transport System](#) (para 67). These priorities include tackling climate change and improving the quality of life. The report encourages regional bodies to promote sustainable transport (para 220).

It is also encouraging that the report emphasizes consultation and transparency in decision-making about local transport, recommending that:

- the process for drawing up the Single Regional Strategy, which will cover both planning and transport, 'should engage widely with interested parties and the wider public' (para 19);
- the region's new Joint Transport and Infrastructure Board 'develop a method to consult the public at the earliest possible stage and allow their views to contribute to the options put forward. Engagement must not only be done, it must be seen to be done' (para 34); and
- 'local campaigns for transport improvements deserve to be taken seriously. . . . There are cases of local campaigns eventually succeeding in their goals and achieving tangible improvements as a result. A greater willingness on the part of transport decision makers to engage with such groups would be welcome' (para 171).

More specifically, the Committee urges local authorities to set up Integrated Transport Authorities (para 79). This would be of great benefit to Bristol, as shown by comparison with cities which have ITAs, such as Birmingham. It is to be hoped that the local authorities surrounding Bristol heed this advice!

The Committee is rightly concerned about the capacity gap in rolling stock for the region's rail services. This has been exacerbated by the cancellation of the new diesel trains which were planned before it was decided to electrify the line between London and Bristol. While local trains are already overcrowded, the region will now have to wait several years for extra diesel trains displaced by electrification in the Thames Valley. As the report states, 'We urge the Government to finalise its new rolling stock plan as soon as possible' (para 122).

It is disappointing, however, that, while the report reviews the aspirations for the Bristol Metro project, it makes no actual recommendations for improvements to Bristol's suburban rail system. These are badly needed, along with the restoration of passenger services to the Portishead line. The report is rightly critical of the cumbersome processes for deciding and funding infrastructure improvements, but does little to suggest reforms.

It is also regrettable that the report makes no mention at all of tram or light rail schemes for the region. The single occasion on which the word 'tram' is used in the report is with reference to London. It is a matter of concern that Government funding for local transport effectively favours environmentally unfriendly diesel guided bus schemes over light rail schemes, [a practice criticised in a recent study by the All-Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group](#). It is disappointing that the report does not examine this issue.