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Significant estimated cost increases for MetroWest Phase 1

On 17 March the West of England Joint Transport Board will be advised of significant increases in the estimated cost for MetroWest Phase 1.

The members of the West of England Joint Transport Board will discuss a report that advises that the indicative cost estimate to deliver MetroWest Phase 1 has risen from £58 million to between £145 million and £175 million.

The revised cost estimate includes:

- Additional costs identified by Network Rail following detailed technical work that has taken place as part of the next stage of the Governance for Rail Investment Projects (GRIP) process. This includes an increase in the scope of the works through the Avon Gorge.
- Additional costs identified by the Councils. This includes the need to consider an alternative road access for Ashton Vale Trading Estate and associated land acquisition and environmental mitigation.

The Joint Transport Board will consider how to deliver Phase 1 in three stages but need to be certain that what is proposed is affordable and provides value for money, so are likely to ask officers to work with Network Rail and GWR to investigate the costs and practicalities of each stage.

Speaking on behalf of the Joint Transport Board, the Chair, **Councillor Colin Hunt**, said, "It seems likely that the Joint Transport Board will not be able to commit to delivery of the full MetroWest Phase 1 at this stage as the estimated costs are outside the existing allocated budget.

"Now we know what is required to deliver the full scope of Phase 1 we can look at how best to move forwards to deliver these much needed improvements to the local rail network and are already working closely with Network Rail and Great Western Railways on this."

Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport said:

"The Department for Transport recognises the benefits of the MetroWest scheme and in particular the positive impacts it will have for the people of Bristol. I have asked my officials to continue working with all parties to find a workable resolution to this issue."

Simon Maple, Network Rail Western Route Programme and Project Sponsor, said:

“Network Rail has provided the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership with a detailed study of the range of options and costs to deliver the MetroWest rail scheme. Major projects such as this one cannot be taken forward until they are properly scoped and planned and have a robust estimate of what the cost will be. These detailed estimates have been independently verified and provide a realistic representation of the costs involved in delivering MetroWest rail.

“We will continue to work together with the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership, GWR and the Department for Transport on potential next steps to deliver this project and further improve rail services for passengers.”

Editor’s notes

This does not affect MetroWest Phase 2.

The board will consider a staged approach to Phase 1 - all dependent on cost, value for money, technical work and the capital and revenue funding being available:

- Upgrading Keynsham and Oldfield Park and the Severn Beach Line stations to a ½ hourly service (hourly beyond Avonmouth)
- Providing an initial frequency service to Portishead
- Providing a half hourly service to Portishead.

MetroWest Phase 1 proposes the re-opening the Portishead rail line to passenger train services and to enhance local passenger train services on the Severn Beach and Bath to Bristol lines including a new rail station at Portishead and the reopening of the former station at Pill.

Original cost expectation

The previous cost estimation for MetroWest Phase 1, as reported to the Joint Transport Board, was £58.2 million.

Current cost estimation

The overall capital cost ranges from £145m to £175m to deliver the full project scope

The £58 million budget for MetroWest Phase 1 is made up of:

£4.3 million from the local Councils

£53.4 million from the WoE LEP Local Growth Fund

Leaving £0.5 million in the original budget yet to be funded.

The £53.4 million funding was made available for the delivery of the total MetroWest Phase 1 project.

How much has it cost to date?

Approx £8million has already been invested so far in the investigations, preparations and design of the scheme by the Councils and the Local Enterprise Partnership through the Local Growth Fund, and a further £950k has been invested by North Somerset Council in strategic land acquisition.

Why has it increased so much?

The key drivers for the increase are:

- A significant increase in the scope of work through the Avon Gorge in order to; meet modern safety standards to enable operation of a scheduled passenger train service, to deliver the necessary line speeds to achieve the 2 trains per hour aspiration and the poor access reducing construction productivity.
- The impact of the full service pattern (2 trains per hour all day) alongside existing freight services, at the Ashton Vale Level crossing on rail safety, highway safety, traffic and the industrial estate resulting in the need to consider an alternative access from the A370/ rear of the site.
- The consequential impact from the above on the amount of land, DCO (planning) requirements and environmental mitigation needed to deliver the scheme.
- The increased risks associated with the project following the expanded works and recently identified constraints. As currently configured, even if the funding was found, the scheme is inherently more risky.

(Note that the speed of trains needed to provide a half hourly service needs to increase to approximately 50mph through the four tunnels and up to 75 mph on the reopened section. This has presented significant engineering challenges.)

END

For more information:

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