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Response to the West of England Partnership
Draft Joint Local Transport Plan 3

Radstock Action Group welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft JLTP3.

Our response is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Radstock: an overview of the town and its current transport
3. Key Issues for Radstock
4. Major Priorities:
 - a. Regeneration
 - b. Protection and enhancement of the built and natural environment
 - c. Development of practical links beyond Radstock, the removal of barriers
 - d. Renewable energy hub
5. Key recommendations
6. Appendices:
 1. Radstock Action Group Response to the Consultation on the RUS
 2. Radstock Action Group Response to the consultation on Bus Route 768

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Whilst we acknowledge that a general statement, by its very nature, is going to be limited, we are very disappointed that Radstock hardly appears in this consultation document, except in relation to cycle routes.
- 1.2 We also acknowledge that in the current economic climate, it is difficult to be either ambitious or very specific in plans and projections. However, the regeneration of areas such as Radstock must be central to plans as the economic crisis can only worsen if areas long needing regeneration are ignored.
- 1.3 Radstock is in a very particular geographical location in relation to the area covered by JLTP3 – it lies at the extreme edge of the region. Future transport needs must not be seen only within the framework of the JLTP for this region however, since the regeneration and development of Radstock will depend on removing transport and travel barriers to the South West, the South Coast and to London and its SE surroundings.
- 1.4 We regard the proposals as far too road transport orientated with little regard for the potential of renewing and improving rail links.
- 1.5 The Strategic Environmental Assessment focuses on a very limited number of sites; it pays no attention to the biodiversity of less well-known areas.
- 1.6 JLTP3 is very much focused on cities and major urban/metropolitan areas. It has

been suggested that this is because this is where the majority of the population live. However, given the environmental priorities and the need to cut down on car and van commuting for example, it is essential that rural and semi-rural communities are regarded as key focal points for the JLTP3 debate encouraging more sustainable arrangements, and congruent with the declared aims of 'flagging up environmental issues and identifying mitigating measures'.

1.7 This concentration on urban issues is reflected in the SEA with little acknowledgment of the biodiversity and the risks posed by poor transport solutions. A specific example can be found in the omission of Mells Valley SAC from the list of international sites in paragraph 4.4.1.

2. Radstock: an overview of the town and its current transport situation

2.1 Radstock is a former mining town with a long history going back before the industrial era; it has suffered from lack of investment and regeneration since the pits closed in 1973 but is keen to move on.

2.2 The town and its surrounding area have much to offer in terms of tourism which has not been prioritised and which requires development which can only happen if the area is easily accessible.

2.3 Radstock is beset by congestion (and accompanying air and noise pollution and general degradation of the built and natural environment caused by excessive car usage, especially by commuters to Bath

2.4 The scheme outlined is severely circumscribed by the need to look only to the geographical boundaries of the area covered by this particular draft plan. Radstock should be opening out to South, South West and London, as well as providing a transport hub for the local area including Midsomer Norton, Paulton, Chilcompton, and neighbouring settlements.

2.5 Radstock is on the receiving end of a lack of joined up thinking by transport and other road planners. One of the most recent examples of this is the bus lane built recently adjoining the Park and Ride at Odd Down. No sooner had the bus lane been completed than the bus services to and from Radstock were cut by 25%.

2.6 Radstock experiences very high levels of air pollution owing to a mixture of excessive car use and being set in a dip surrounded at close quarters by hills.

2.7 Repeated road surveys have revealed increasing amounts of traffic – so far no solutions have been suggested, neither have any detailed analyses of these traffic surveys been made public.

2.8 Public transport in the form of bus services is poor; expensive; unreliable; slow. In the past 12 months services have been reduced and ticket prices have escalated. Most recently the cost of a Park and Ride ticket has risen from £2.50 to £3, an increase of 20%.

2.9 Regular buses to Bath are marred by long gaps in the timetable at key commuter periods, for example, there is no bus from Radstock for Bath between 08.50 and 09.26. The 178 which runs between Bristol and Bath via Radstock is very often up to 20 minutes late owing to the unrealistically tight schedule; when it's 20 minutes late this results in it running together with the following bus.

3. Key Issues for Radstock

3.1 The undue emphasis in this document on road transport will not enable the best outcomes for the regeneration of Radstock. Reinstatement of the rail link to Frome would kickstart the local economy and regeneration more than any other single

transport initiative.

- 3.2 With its thriving set of niche shops; its world renowned museum; valuable natural environment, boasting very special biodiversity; a town centre described as 'the best preserved mining town centre in the country' and walking options to a wide range of destinations, Radstock is ideally placed to be a tourist centre to complement the tourist interest not just of Bath but of the the whole area.
- 3.3 The introduction of reliable and practical public transport links to the town would encourage businesses to locate/relocate to the town. A renewed rail link with easy access not just to London but to the South West and West would be a valuable selling point and would enable those wishing to get to Bath to do so, by train in 50 minutes – no longer, and at peak congestion times quicker than the road.
- 3.4 The rail link provides a practical solution to the need to encourage those who work other than in Radstock, to avoid going by car. Unfortunately, however well intentioned the sentiments behind the ideas of encouraging walking and cycling, these are not practical solutions for many people given the hills, lack of pavements and pedestrian routes.
- 3.5 With its centre being a conservation area, we must avoid the introduction of new roads into the area. We do not understand why the HCA which is nominated as a partner in the consultation appears to be pursuing a policy at odds with the key goals. The HCA appears to be supporting, with funding, the construction of a new road in the town centre. This road will, contrary to all best planning practice, bring all through traffic into the town centre, rather than leaving it to skirt the area as it does at present. Whilst we acknowledge that the current configuration and organisation is not ideal, we refute the idea that a new road through the middle would improve the situation.
- 3.6 Satellite Park and Ride solutions should be considered to contribute to the aim of keeping through traffic out of the town centre. In particular we suggest that, in conjunction with the rail link reinstatement to Frome, and even before this can be finalised, feasibility studies should be conducted on the possibility of having a satellite to the south of the town and another towards Farrington Gurney, enabling commuters to leave their cars and link to the major Park and Ride facilities nearer to major towns, via dedicated bus services.

4. **Joint Major Priorities**

- 4.1 Railway reinstatement provides an essential complementary and alternative to road focused projects¹
- 4.2 Protection and enhancement of the built and natural environment and promotion of sustainable transport solutions to complement sustainable regeneration and economic development
- 4.3 Development of practical links beyond Radstock, the removal of barriers to travel for residents, for people working in Radstock and for leisure visitors
- 4.4 Promotion of the town as a renewable energy hub which obviously requires a serious increase in sustainable transport options
- 4.5 Radstock and Midsomer Norton are two discrete and complementary towns and should not be regarded as one unit. In order for each one to retain its distinctiveness, there must be careful detail enshrined in the final Plan, acknowledging that the solutions for the two communities may not be the same but

¹ Radstock Action Group's submission to the Route Utilisation Strategy is reprinted in Appendix 1 of the present document

should contribute to the overall goal of improving connectivity for rural and semi-rural communities.

5. **Key Recommendations**

- 5.1 Bath-centric approach for Radstock should be replaced by more flexible and imaginative services and initiatives.
- 5.2 The rail link between Radstock and Frome should be reinstated². This is widely supported by the local community, as illustrated by the very large number of signatories to the on-line and hard copy petition on this matter.
- 5.3 The withdrawal of all proposals to build a major new road link through the centre of the town.
- 5.4 The local authority should publish the most recent Radstock traffic surveys together with comprehensive analysis of the findings.
- 5.5 The heightening of the Flood Risk in the most recent assessment for Radstock Town Centre should be taken into consideration at all points.

² To view 'Next Stop Radstock?' Radstock Action Group's film on the Radstock – Frome railway, go to: http://www.radstockactiongroup.org.uk/film_next_stop_radstock.php
Radstock Action Group: Response to WEPJLTP3

Appendix 1 Route Utilisation Strategy
Great Western Rail Utilisation Strategy

Consultation

A Response from Radstock Action Group
November 2009

IN SUPPORT OF THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE LINE BETWEEN
RADSTOCK AND FROME

1. Radstock Action Group welcomes the opportunity to participate in the debate over the future of rail services in the Great Western Region. We have read the Draft RUS and are encouraged to see that there are proposals to improve services right across the region. We believe that there is an acknowledgement of the opportunities to enhance business by building usage by members of small communities which currently suffer from lack of services and lack of connectivity.
2. This response requests that Network Rail and its partners, in determining the strategic development of rail services in the Great Western region, address the possibility of reinstating the rail link between Radstock and Frome. As we only became aware of this consultation process late on 25 November, our comments inevitably lack detail and we will continue to look more closely at the consultation papers and address new issues as they arise.
3. When Radstock was the centre of the now defunct North Somerset Coalfield, rail played a crucial role in linking the town to the outside world, through the transportation of coal. Once the coalfield closed, the railway fell into disuse but the trackbed is still in existence in certain areas, including Radstock to Frome. Whilst Radstock continues to plan for regeneration, there is no doubt that the introduction of a rail link, as part of an integrated transport system would encourage more businesses and individuals by providing fast and appropriate services to major centres from London through to Plymouth, without having to connect via Bath Spa.
4. We note in 2.2.2:
The Great Western RUS will therefore:
 - propose options to achieve the most efficient and effective use of the existing rail network and identify cost effective opportunities to improve it where appropriate
 - enable Network Rail to develop an informed renewals, maintenance and enhancements programme in line with the Department for Transport's aspirations and the reasonable requirements of train operators and

other key stakeholders

- enable local and Regional Transport Plans and freight plans to reflect a realistic view of the future rail network.

5. We hope that our specific comments will be seen as a contribution to the debate and be born in mind within these parameters.
6. Radstock is situated on the furthest edge of Bath and North East Somerset. This obviously ensures that links with Bath itself feature in strategic thinking, but we wish to suggest that Radstock equally sees itself as having worthwhile and important links to the areas south of the authority, linking it directly to the region covered by rail connections through Frome and Westbury.
7. Together with such towns as Midsomer Norton and Paulton, plus the outlying villages, it comprises a population which is effectively isolated from major transport links. In the past decade or more, the road system has become more and more congested and it now takes up to 90 minutes to reach such key routes as the M4 and M5 by road. Roads are the only option for those wishing to travel outside the area, whether by car or train. Even a journey into Bath by car takes up to 45 minutes and is then followed by the expense and time needed to secure a parking space prior to catching a train.
8. We suggest that if there were better connectivity, including the reinstatement of a rail link to Radstock from Frome, that there would be take up by those wishing to reach as far afield as London, not to mention Bristol and destinations in the South West.
9. A reinstated Radstock to Frome line would facilitate inter-urban links and bring more connectivity without using Bath Spa which appears to be under stress according to the consultation document.
10. Westbury features repeatedly in the consultation document as a place ready for development and with an increased role in connectivity between Bristol/South Coast and London/Thames corridor. The enhanced use predicted for Westbury Station is good news and could be further enhanced if only a fraction of the commuting residents, of the Radstock and Midsomer Norton, Somer Valley and surrounding districts had access to a rail link. Plus, of course, those requiring rail services for other uses.
11. Similarly there is considerable discussion of South Wales/Bristol/South Coast links needing improvement. A reinstated Radstock line would act as a feeder service and consolidate usage.
12. Branches in the region are already being re-opened for general usage, for

example, Wareham – Swanage and Taunton – Minehead.

13. The Parkman Report, which was produced some years ago, emphasized the benefits and practicalities of through trains from Radstock to Swindon. The pressure is now greater as the Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon corridor has expanded considerably since then with more building planned, so further road usage would be expected. Already, Wiltshire Unitary District Council has promoted a service between Westbury and Swindon with an extension to Frome.
14. Currently, there no real integrated transport facilities at Radstock, merely bus and cycle, in spite of the town technically being part of the Greater Bristol Bus Network. If rail were included, there would be real choice for commuters, both in and out-bound and reduced road vehicles. An early commuter train (currently starting at Frome) could be changed to start at Radstock, then call at a new Frome Market station before continuing on its current route to London. Trains could run throughout the day bringing Radstock and surrounding areas into immediate contact with the rest of the rail network.
15. Even now, if the line were built, trains could be run to Trowbridge, Swindon, Bath, Bristol via Westbury and as far afield as London without requiring further rolling stock. It is hoped that freight could also be included: protection of links will permit fewer heavy lorries on the road in the future.
16. We realise that it will be necessary to survey extensively to gain proof of potential numbers and are in the process of organising some investigations, still at an early stage. We already have a petition which contains thousands of signatures in support of the railway link; we intend trying now to establish more accurately how many people would actually use any such rail link.
17. Radstock Action Group would welcome becoming part of the Wider Stakeholder Group (WSG) (section 2.3.2). This would then tie Radstock's needs in with the objectives of the Regional Spatial Strategy mentioned in section 5.2.2.7 and the Regional Economic Strategy section 5.2.3 (page 91).

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Appendix 2 Bus Consultation Response

Forthcoming Tenders for Supported Bus Services

A response from Radstock Action Group on 768 Service

Radstock Action Group welcomes the opportunity to comment on the forthcoming tender operation for the 768.

In general, our view is that:

1. Bus services play, and hopefully will increasingly play an important part in the reduction of car usage, the lessening of pollution and congestion and the smooth interaction between different communities for social, economic and employment purposes.
2. All buses should be accessible to all residents and workers. This includes in terms of physical access to the vehicles; appropriate numbers of well-sited bus stops with up-to-date timetable and other relevant information for users; affordable fares with through ticketing and, eventually a regional transport ticketing system similar to, for example, Oyster in London; regular, reliable services.

In relation to the proposals for the 768:

1. We note that two distinct markets are served by this route and we suggest that splitting the service and making it daily rather than having enhanced services on two days will do much to encourage usage. Splitting the service may also lead to fewer delays.
2. We believe that enhancing services to Radstock will encourage more visitors, to shop, to enjoy the local amenities such as the museum and the walking/cycling route; in the longer term, if the rail link to Frome is reinstated, this bus service will enable a wider range of passengers from outlying villages to use the trains and thus be better connected to the South West.
3. We are in favour of enhancing the service as it will support the principles of stronger, safer communities.
4. We note the preponderance of those with concessions using the bus service. This is not surprising since fares are prohibitively high for low or unwaged people; this includes the many young people in the district who simply cannot afford to use the bus services. It remains the case that car usage is a cheaper option for most potential users without concessionary status.
5. At present there is virtually no services between Radstock and Farrington Gurney. We suggest that a regular service is instituted during this process, to include Farrington Gurney, Clutton, Hallatrow and Paulton and to be

scheduled to fit with the service between Wells and Bristol, thus providing a new link for many people wishing to travel between Radstock and Bristol. This service would also enable residents and workers in the above-mentioned villages to be able to visit Radstock for work, shopping and leisure purposes.

6. We request the introduction of a Youth Bus Pass, to facilitate employment chances for those living in the area and using this service.
7. We also wish to see through ticketing, not just for these services but for all services within the BANES and Bristol transport system.

Radstock Action Group

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