

Avon plans heavy rail upgrade

In July last year a consortium led by Avon County Council commissioned Transmark (in association with DHV Burrow-Crocker and JMP Consultants) to examine the opportunities to enhance local rail services in the county. A 20-year rolling programme of improvement schemes was suggested in the report.

AVON could benefit from low-cost heavy-rail expansion on three existing routes leading into Bristol, concludes Transmark in its recent study of the county's rail services. Modest capital investment in station openings and route improvements could yield attractive returns.

For the medium term, up to 1999, three improvement phases are proposed in the Strategic Avon Rail Study (STARS) report. The map shows the basic upgrading which would be tackled in Phase I.

Phase II would add new stations at Long Ashton on the Weston-super-Mare line, Saltford on the Bath line, Ashley Hill in north Bristol and Charfield on the line to Gloucester. Phase II would also extend the local service beyond Bath Spa to Chippenham, with new stations at Bathampton and Corsham.

Phase III would see a local service introduced on the freight-only route from Filton South to Avonmouth (the line due west of Bristol Parkway on the long term map).

The service pattern proposed for Phase III is as follows:



On-street rapid transit could complement the STARS heavy rail proposals. Badgerline has proposed a system using the GLT bus/tram hybrid, made by Bombardier BN of Belgium; the vehicle would use a central sunken guide rail and overhead live wires in the city centre, while acting as a diesel-electric articulated bus in the suburbs.

- two trains per hour between Bathampton and Filton South via Bath and central Bristol, extended on an hourly basis to Chippenham and Gloucester at each end;
- three trains per hour between Weston-super-Mare and Bristol Temple Meads, with at least one train per hour extending to Filton

South;

- two trains per hour between Avonmouth and Filton South.

Highlights of the new stations programme include the development of a major new station at Filton South to serve a new Ministry of Defence site (which will eventually employ 5,500 people) and other proposed developments in the area; two new park-and-ride stations for Bath (at Bathampton on the east and Newbridge on the west side); and the development of Lawrence Hill to provide an additional interchange station serving central Bristol.

Lawrence Hill and Temple Meads would be linked by a high-frequency shuttle bus giving good penetration of the city centre, and overcoming the out-of-the-way location of Temple Meads. In time, the shuttle could be run by light rail transit or GLT, the hybrid bus-rail project which has been proposed for Bristol by Badgerline, the local bus company. The heavy rail proposals in the STARS report would complement the transit proposals that have been made for the city; as shown in the long-term map, light rail or GLT (whichever is chosen) could take over the Severn Beach branch.

Rolling stock

It is not considered feasible by Transmark to operate reconditioned Heritage units on the

