

5<sup>th</sup> January 2018

West of England Joint Spatial Plan  
C/o South Gloucestershire Council, Planning  
PO Box 1954  
Bristol  
BS37 0DD



**John Penrose MP**

I am writing to respond to the Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) published by the West of England Combined Authority. There's a great deal that's welcome in the plan although, inevitably, local residents also have some concerns as well.

## Better Motorway & Rail Links

The commitment to address traffic jams around M5 J21 is very welcome. The successive rounds of improvements at Junction 21 did wonders initially, but the town's population and businesses keep growing so more capacity is urgently needed.

But the plans for a new J21a at Banwell are nowhere near ambitious enough to solve the traffic jams at J21, particularly once the town's future growth is factored in. Given that north-facing slip roads at the proposed new junction would create congestion on the M5 between J21 and J21a due to 'weaving distances', the expectation is that a new J21a would only have southwards-facing slip roads. But most of the congestion at J21 is caused by Bristol commuters heading north in the morning and returning in the evening, so switching southbound traffic to an expensive new J21a will not solve the traffic jams at J21 at all. Failing to address this central issue will choke future growth in both Weston and all the nearby villages for decades to come, so we should save the money currently envisaged for J21a and spend it on a more ambitious and effective alternative scheme (perhaps a significant expansion or remodelling of J21) that will genuinely solve the problem instead.

Alongside the extra road capacity around the M5, we must provide greener alternatives to commuting by car through improved rail services. More comfortable, less crowded and more frequent rush-hour train journeys between both Weston & Bristol and Weston & Taunton (especially with Hinkley Point C on the horizon) will be needed to reduce demand and congestion on all local roads, not just the M5. I am pleased that existing plans should see very significant capacity improvements to local commuter rail services during 2018, but even more may be needed in future so the JSP should include them in its plans too.

Finally, we should also support the dualling and other improvements on the A303. Even though the works are outside our immediate geography, they will take pressure off the M5-M4 triangle by providing better direct routes from London and the south-east to Devon and Cornwall, particularly during peak holiday season when the M5 is frequently under extra pressure.

## Bristol Airport Traffic

The JSP rightly highlights the importance of Bristol Airport for domestic and global business and leisure travel, and its positive impact on local jobs. We need better ground transport links (both road and, potentially, rail) between the Airport and Bristol, and to reduce increasing

problems with congestion through rural villages to the south and west of the airport for traffic linking to the rest of the southwest from the M5 too.

This means we must divert traffic away from rural villages, and onto safer roads with less potential for congestion. The JSP already proposes a new eastern feeder road from Junction 20 to handle population growth around the Nailsea and Backwell areas, and the recently-completed south Bristol Link road is already in place. As a result the JSP should include a strong working assumption that the greenest, cheapest and best value solution would be to extend either or both of these existing schemes short distances, rather than the existing suggestion of a much longer, more expensive and environmentally damaging road southwards through Wrington Vale towards Junction 21, 21a or 22. The JSP's own environmental rating for this idea (page 257 and Appendix A page 69) is, rightly, extremely negative and either or both of these alternatives should be chosen instead.

## Housing

I am delighted to see a strong commitment to building 'up not out' in existing urban centres such as Weston, to help absorb the requirement for new homes (21,000 in North Somerset plus many more across the wider JSP area) over the plan period. This helps economic regeneration by bringing fresh life to traditional town centres (particularly when they're struggling against competition from online retailers and from out-of-town centres like Cribbs), makes use of existing transport and social infrastructure, is far better value for money, is greener because fewer fields are concreted over, and reduces commuting because people can live closer to their jobs.

However the plan should be far bolder in this area. Currently, only a fraction of the new housing is proposed for the centre of towns (mainly in Weston) and there is a great deal more potential capacity for creating good-looking 4, 5 or 6 story mansion blocks, terraces or mews housing (rather than high-rise towers) in other urban areas like Bristol, to match the ones which already exist in pockets such as Clifton, or more widely in Bath.

This solution would be far better than the proposals for 2 new towns (misleadingly called 'Garden Villages' in the JSP) north of Sandford and Churchill. These proposals already face very significant opposition from local residents who are rightly concerned they will degrade the rural character of the area, are environmentally inferior because they will concrete over green fields and increase commuting, and represent worse value for money because they will require a great deal of costly new infrastructure. Being more ambitious about 'Build Up Not Out' will avoid all these problems.

## Banwell Bypass

I am delighted to see proposals for a Banwell bypass in the JSP. It is long overdue, essential and extremely welcome. We must not miss this opportunity to get it built.

But the JSP should not make the proposed new M5 J21a into a condition for building a Banwell bypass. Given the longstanding traffic jams around the 'Banwell narrows', plus the JSP's proposals for extra housebuilding in the village, the 'short-route' bypass (re-joining the A368 around Towerhead) will be needed and should be built in any case, as a standalone project for the existing road network, no matter what alternative plans eventually emerge instead of J21a.

The same cannot be said for the JSP's longer potential bypass routes around Sandford, Langford and Churchill. If the plans for J21a have to be scrapped in favour of a more ambitious and effective solution to the jams at J21, as I've outlined above, these longer routes will not be needed, or wanted either. They would destroy the area's rural character and would inevitably,

over time, mean those villages would spread out to the new road line, making them even bigger than the already-sizeable increases which the JSP suggests.

Equally, the longer routes around Sandford, Churchill and Langford are not justified by any need to connect with the two proposed new towns (the so-called ‘garden villages’) north of Banwell and Churchill. I have argued that we should be more ambitious about building ‘Up Not Out’ instead of creating these settlements at all but, if either or both of them were to go ahead, it would be a mistake to build roads which linked them with a new M5 J21a because the south-only slip roads would mean it would not be usable for anyone travelling to Bristol. As a result the northbound traffic would go cross-country to the A370 and J21, making rural roads and villages even more congested. If the new towns are built they should connect to the A370 and J21 instead.

As a result, attempts to justify the two proposed new towns as a necessary price to release investment money for the longer bypass routes, or for a new M5 J21a, are also flawed. Because a long route is the wrong answer for airport traffic (there are shorter, cheaper, greener alternative routes as explained above), and also wrong for any extra traffic from the two new towns if they are built after all (it goes to the wrong motorway junction, as also explained above), neither one is a satisfactory justification for a long route. And if the long route isn’t needed, then extra houses in two new towns aren’t required to pay for it either.

## Green Belt

Finally, to provide the strongest possible protection against further unwanted future development beyond the scope of the current plans, the JSP should include a new green belt from the southern edge of the existing green belt to the northern edge of the Mendip Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and west to the M5. Opportunistic development pressure on villages like Congresbury, Churchill, Yatton and Sandford will then be relieved with a permanently higher level of protection in place. This will encourage developers to look into other options, such as building up not out as discussed in detail above.

Yours sincerely,

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*MP for Weston-super-Mare*

***Supported by:***

Councillor Ann Harley, Councillor Tom Leimdorfer, Councillor Jerry O’Brien,  
Councillor Liz Wells,