

Portishead Railway gets back on track as £27m funding approved

The West of England Combined Authority has committed £27m to resurrect the Portishead Railway line. Work on the long-awaited project is set to start in the summer – some 61 years after the line's closure. The news comes after a period of uncertainty last year when government funding for the project was withdrawn.

But following discussions in February between regional leaders and Rail Minister Peter Hendy, the project received the green light. Metro Mayor Dan Norris said: "Thanks to the deal I struck with the Rail Minister, residents can look forward to work getting back on track this summer to reopen the Bristol and Portishead Line.

"With another £27m of funding approved by my mayoral combined authority, we are investing in jobs and growth, and creating opportunities for new homes for local people along the line that was dreamed up by Isambard Kingdom Brunel almost 200 years ago.

"Once trains are running again between Temple Meads and Portishead, journey times will have been halved and my reverse Beeching programme will have unlocked an extra £43m a year for our regional economy. Full steam ahead!"

The Department for Transport was initially set to absorb any cost pressures exceeding the £152m budget for the scheme. However, following discussions with the Rail Minister, it has been decided that Weca and North Somerset Council will share the burden of a £30m increase in costs.

During the latest meeting of the Weca committee, which marked

Metro Mayor Mr Norris' final session, there was a notably light-hearted atmosphere. Reflecting on the financial contributions, Mr Norris remarked: "I hope North Somerset are damn appreciative because we've given £27m, they've given £3m."

Addressing his fellow committee members, representing the leaders of Bristol, South Gloucestershire, and Bath and North East Somerset Councils, he encouraged them to "take as much credit as you like".

He added: "I want to see the damn thing happen. It's been the bane of my life since I've been mayor in a sense because it's always been tantalisingly close but not happened. I really think its going to happen now."

The railway line in question was shut down in 1964 during the infamous "Beeching cuts."

To reinstate the railway, just over three miles of new track is required. The line up to Pill has been reinstated for freight purposes, but further work is necessary to make it suitable for passenger services.

New stations at Portishead and Pill are also part of the plan.

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