

City Region Deal will be used to improve important road link

West Lothian Council is planning to use its place at the top table of a powerful council lobby group to push for vital improvements to the Avon Gorge road link.

The route is regarded as vital, not just to Falkirk and West Lothian, but to the Scottish economy as a key link between the M8 and M9 and it is well used by haulage and distribution firms despite its reputation as an accident blackspot. Latest estimates put the bill to improve the Gorge link at around £50 million.

It is top of the wish list along with wider road and rail improvements including the development of Winchburgh's new railway station.

An enhanced university presence in West Lothian – which has already fostered greater links with Heriot Watt university – is also in the sights of councillors as they take the chairs in regional development bodies.

Councillor leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick and his deputy, Kirsteen Sullivan, will assume the chairs of two oversight committees of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal in 2024.

Councillors on the Economy, Community Empowerment Wealth

Building PDSP heard a presentation on the work carried out as part of the Deal's Regional Prosperity Framework to develop local economies.

The City Region Deal [was signed five years ago](#) as a collaboration between councils in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife, as well as both the UK and Scottish governments, to promote sustainable development and job creation.

It is also a collective voice to call on Holyrood and Westminster for investment in infrastructure and economic development.

Cllr Sullivan, who chairs the PDSP, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that the Avon Gorge improvement was top of the list to improve regional transport links.

"The Regional Prosperity Framework is to seek commitments from both governments to help us deliver that prosperity. That is commitment to resources and money."

She added: "It's pretty much a package of initiatives and projects that we think, should there be more funding available, can be delivered. So it is ready to go, rather than 'here's some money, come up with some ideas.'"

Andy Nichol, the Deal's Programme Manager told the PDSP: "It has operated very successfully. There are lots of good things to point to. Over 100,000 people have been up-skilled and over 4,500 people have been helped into work."

Cllr Andrew Miller told the meeting that a number of cross authority initiatives in the past tend to be dominated by Edinburgh.

"Everything we have heard today suggests this is an exception to the rule and West Lothian is very much an equal partner," he said. "Is what we are hearing today as good as it seems?"

Mr Nichol told the meeting: "The rotation of the governance

and leadership is very important to ensure the City Region Deal is not Edinburgh dominated.”

He described councillors Fitzpatrick and Sullivan as “ first among equals” when taking the chairs of the oversight committees.

by Stuart Somerville, Local Democracy Reporter