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Booming Bristol can soar into the European Super-League if the city works with its neighbours rather than squabbling with them, a controversial new report will say today. The biggest-ever study of English cities says Bristol must become a regional capital, with more powers to help it step up its economic success.

The State of the English Cities report puts other major West areas, including Swindon, Gloucester and Bournemouth, as poised to increase their wealth and prestige in the coming years.

But the massive 450-page document will trigger fears in the countryside that they will be left behind, while smaller towns such as Bath and Weston-super-Mare may be concerned about a takeover by their larger neighbour.

Local Government Minister David Miliband said the report showed cities such as Bristol had the best opportunity since the 19th century to put themselves into the European Champions League.

He said: "This landmark report shows our cities have made a successful recovery after years of decline. Cities have become engines of growth again." The Minister said successful cities had particular strengths - such as engineering in Bristol - but the lesson from the US was that they had to have several areas of expertise.

The report insists the whole of the South West will benefit from a successful Bristol, but made it clear there could be no return to the infighting of recent years.

Constant bickering between Bristol and South Gloucestershire eventually scuppered ambitious plans for a Supertram project that would have been the most prestigious transport scheme in the region.

The report's author Professor Michael Parkinson is based in Liverpool, where the

city council's constant battles with neighbouring authorities are blamed for the city staying in the relegation zone of English cities.

HE contrasted that with Manchester, which has soared to become the fifth wealthiest English city because of the way the city has worked with other local councils to provide jobs and investment.

Professor Parkinson said such an approach could catapult Bristol into the European Super League - it is currently 34th - and behind only London among the major English cities.

He told the Western Daily Press: "Bristol is changing its spots. It is a place that, as a region, really did not pull together in the past and I think that was a disadvantage. But in the last couple of years there has been a real effort to get it working, a sub-regional partnership across the four local authorities (Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) and cross support of the parties.

"If they are going to have sustainable growth they will have to collaborate." Professor Parkinson talked to dozens of people across the West, including councillors, business leaders and the voluntary sector.

He said there was not much demand for an elected mayor in Bristol, which will put him on collision course with Ministers who are desperate for more to join politicians such as London's Ken Livingstone.

And he said there was no desire for a major shake-up of local councils - something the Government is planning, in a controversial move that could sweep away historic counties such as Wiltshire and Somerset.

The report used the latest official figures to compare the 56 largest English towns and cities, and showed the South West was among the most successful regions.

Bristol, Gloucester, Swindon and Bournemouth were all in the top 12 for wealth, in a table topped by Reading - and with Blackburn at rock bottom.