

Public questions to the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body Board

Board Meeting 13 March 2024

Agenda Item - Public Participation

- Statements from members of the public in line with the Board's Public Participation Scheme, statements/questions and responses are provided below.
- Questions were received from:
 1. **David Batho**
 2. **David Redgewell, South West Transport Network & Railfuture Severnside**

1) Question from David Batho

Received 4th March 2024, updated 7th March.

At the December 2023 STB Board Meeting it was resolved to prepare a short, focused Strategic Transport Plan (STP) for approval at the March 2024 Board Meeting.

Clearly, the outcome and recommendations of the National Highways 'M4 to Dorset Coast Connectivity Study', which was initiated in mid-2021, will be of paramount importance to the formulation of the STP.

To-date, however, the 'M4 to Dorset Coast Connectivity Study' report has not been published, although it is known that the outcome and recommendations have been with the DfT and government ministers since March 2023.

My question is, therefore - Have the 'M4 to Dorset Coast Connectivity Study' outcome and recommendations been made available to the STB and, if so, have they been outlined and incorporated in the March 2024 STP?

(updated, 7th March) Further to the request that my question be asked at the Board Meeting I can now see, having read the papers for the meeting, that the study has not been incorporated in the STP. The STP simply reports that the study is to be published during 2024 and appears as the last item on the timeline (page 4) with the remark 'expected 2024'. There is also a short general policy statement (NS1) under Theme 4 - page 11.

The Cabinet Member for Highways in B&NES (Cllr Manda Rigby) informed me last December that the outcome and recommendations of the 'M4 to Dorset Coast Connectivity Study' had been on the ministers desk since March 2023 - the comment I included in my question.

On reflection, I think my question should have been along the lines of - what has been the hold up and when will the study, which was initiated in mid 2021, be published?

Response:

At the current date, Western Gateway is unable to provide any additional information regarding the publication of the M4 to Dorset Coast report. As Mr Batho notes, the report was submitted to ministers over a year ago. As yet, they have not given approval for publication, nor any indicative date of when that may be given.

Without ministerial approval of the report and its findings, we have been unable to include specific recommendations from the report in our Strategic Transport Plan. Rather, the Plan notes the forthcoming publication of the report and signposts a review of the findings, once available, for inclusion in future iterations of the STP and/or Strategic Investment Plan.

2) Question from David Redgewell, South west transport Network and Railfuture Severnside

Received 7th March 2024. (NB: David originally submitted 4 questions, but due to limited time on the agenda and as per the public participation rules, agreed to select a single question).

What progress is being made?

On the Regional coach strategy

And the provision of coach service from Cheltenham spa Royal Well bus and coach station, new Arles court Transport Interchange in Cheltenham spa Gloucestershire and Salisbury, Bournemouth and Poole

With the very welcome investment by Gloucestershire county council at Cheltenham spa Arles court Transport Interchange and park and ride site

Salisbury coach station contract work under way now to improve this coach station,

But we are concerned at the proposal by Somerset council to close passengers facilities at Yeovil bus and coach station in the peninsula Transport Board area

Including closing Toilets and waiting room which is used by Regional bus and coach services into Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire,

What discussion are happening with Somerset council, to keep the passenger facilities open at Yeovil,

And to make sure the is progress of the bus and coach station interchange at Swindon with Swindon Borough Council for Region buses and coaches,

What discussion are going on with National Express coaches limited, Megabus Scottish City link coaches and Flixbus coaches to provide new North South coach services,

Response

The Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body Coach Strategy was published in August 2023 and is available on our website. The study identifies 3 priority options for potential future coach routes to fill strategic gaps in the public transport network in our region, as well as making a number of further recommendations for Next Steps including:

- 1) Data collection – further research and data gathering undertaken
- 2) Passenger awareness campaign for coach users
- 3) Engagement with coach operators and other stakeholders

In 2023/24 Western Gateway has commenced work on a feasibility assessment of the first of the three identified routes and progressed recommendation 3 by setting up a Coach Forum of operators, local authority officers and passenger/industry representatives. The first Forum was held on 1st February with 33 attendees. The second – an in-person event in

Bristol – will be held on 7th May. Once the Forum gains momentum, we hope this will provide an effective platform for engaging with operators such as National Express, Megabus and Flixbus and our neighbouring authorities (including Swindon and Somerset) on factors affecting the overall regional coach network opportunities (including interchange with other modes).

The first of the new coach routes being assessed runs (roughly) from Bristol Airport in the south to Cheltenham in the north. A number of possible routes (and start/end points) are under consideration, but several options include stops at the new Arles Court interchange and/or Cheltenham town centre.

The first route under assessment does not extend as far south as Salisbury, Bournemouth, Poole or Yeovil and we have not been in discussion about any routes or services in this area. However, the remaining two recommended options do extend to the south coast – we hope to be able to progress assessment of these routes in 2024/25 (dependent on funding settlement).

Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body
12th March 2024