

## **Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body**

### **Board Meeting**

#### **Paper C**

Date **2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024**

Title of report: **Letter to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**

Purpose of report: **To report on the Western Gateway's letter to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Minister for Local Transport)**

#### **Recommendations:**

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. To note the letter to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Local Transport)
- II. To approve sending a tailored version of the letter to all the MPs in the Western Gateway region

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 With the new Government and its five missions and transport priorities it was agreed with the Chair and Vice Chair to write to Simon Lightwood, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Local Transport) introducing the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB) and setting out key issues. The letter was not intended to be a comprehensive description of everything the STB does or the local authorities' aspirations. The letter is set out in section 2.
- 1.2 It is intended to use a tailored version of the letter to write to all of the Members of Parliament in the Western Gateway region.

## **2. Letter to the Under Secretary of State (Minister for Local Transport)**

*Dear Simon*

*Congratulations on your appointment as Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Local Transport).*

*I am Councillor Manda Rigby, the Cabinet Member for Highways for Bath & North East Somerset Council and the newly elected Chair of the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body.*

*The Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body represents an alliance of eight Local Authorities and one Combined Authority, including Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council, Bristol City Council, Dorset Council, Gloucestershire County Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Wiltshire Council and the West of England Combined Authority.*

*The Western Gateway is one of seven Sub-national Transport Bodies in England, setting out the transport strategy for the region, adding value to the work of its local authorities, providing leadership on strategic transport matters, and offering a unified voice for the region's priorities to the government.*

*There are three key areas the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body is currently working on.*

- 1. We are producing a Strategic Investment Plan aligning with the Transport Secretary's priorities, aimed at transforming infrastructure, promoting social mobility, tackling regional inequality, delivering greener transport, and better integrating transport networks. It sets out alongside our long term Strategic Transport Plan the region's priorities for transport investment.*
- 2. Enhancing North - South connectivity, we are working with Network Rail, Great Western Railway, South Western Railway and local authorities to improve services on the Heart of Wessex Line (Bristol to Weymouth). This scheme, estimated between £26m and £32m, (with a Benefit Cost Ratio of 1.83) will significantly improve local and regional connectivity, productivity, social mobility and economic growth. I ask for the Government's support in taking the proposal forward.*
- 3. The Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body is focusing on developing strategic coach routes, creating a strategic cycling network and leading a highly successful freight forum with the neighbouring Peninsula Transport Sub-national Transport Body. The forum works closely with the freight industry on planning for and supporting the efficient movement of goods whilst raising freight awareness amongst our local authorities.*

*We have been awaiting publication of National Highway's M4 to Dorset Coast Study since the end of 2022 and it is now understood that it is being incorporated into the Route Investment Strategy (RIS) process/programme. Please can you review the findings of the report(s) and facilitate the publication of an approved study so that the high priority interventions required to assist our area in reaching its full economic potential can be prioritised and progressed.*

*Similar to the other Sub-national Transport Bodies, our work demonstrates how decision-making on strategic transport at a regional level benefits our local communities. We work closely with the elected Leaders to prioritise strategic transport decisions building in local priorities, regional connectivity and the UK national network as a whole.*

*Our funding from the Department for Transport extends to the end of March 2025. With our valued role and keen to carry on we ask for reassurance funding will be allocated to the Western Gateway for 2025/26 and beyond.*

*I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss our work in more detail and explore opportunities for closer collaboration with your Department.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Councillor Manda Rigby  
Chair of the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body  
Cabinet Member for Highways, Bath & North East Somerset Council*

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 The Board is asked to agree the recommendations set out at the beginning of this report.

### **Contact Officer**

James White, Technical Lead Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body