

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper E

Date **2nd October 2024**

Title of report: **Strategic Investment Plan update**

Purpose of report: **To provide an update on progress on the Strategic Investment Plan**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Note progress on the SIP.
- II. Note risks arising.

1. Background

- 1.1 The long term (2024-2050) Strategic Transport Plan (STP) was approved by the Board in March 2024 and the development of the associated Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) began in May 2024, with a target completion date of April/May 2025.
- 1.2 The overall purpose of the SIP is two-fold:
 - 1) Identify the schemes and proposals that can best achieve the aims and objectives for the Western Gateway region (as specified in the STP)
 - 2) Provide a list of prioritised investment proposals for the region (e.g. to DfT or for funding opportunities)
- 1.3 A SIP Project Board has been established to guide day to day progress, with Cllr Hannah Young as Project Executive. An assessment advisory panel comprised of officers from partner Local Authorities has also been convened to guide the assessment process.

2. Progress to date (September 24)

- 2.1 The full approach to the SIP is outlined below, with items completed highlighted in blue, those in progress in green and those still to be completed in black.

Item	(Expected) completion date
WGSTB developed an assessment methodology for proposals (based on the STP objectives), supporting information and a proforma for submission. Circulated to Local Authority partners.	Completed 1 st August
Local Authority Partners submit proposals for assessment, along with supporting information.	Completed 2 nd Sept
WGSTB assess proposals submitted against the objectives identified. Top scoring proposals are identified and compiled into a draft SIP	End Oct
Consultants (WSP) conduct Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment of prioritised schemes.	13 th Dec
Highways impacts of prioritised schemes modelled	Dec
Public consultation on draft SIP, along with impact assessments	18 th Dec – 2 nd Feb
Consultation responses, impact assessments and other feedback compiled and the SIP re-drafted in response	Feb
Final draft SIP submitted to the Board	13 th March

2.2 The final SIP will then be completed, artworked and published in May 2025, after local elections in some authorities.

3. Proposals received

3.1 Proposals were submitted by all nine partner Authorities (West of England Combined Authority submitted an overall proforma covering all their UAs), National Highways and Network Rail. 101 proposals were received in total.

3.2 Following a validation and sift exercise, 54 proposals have been confirmed to proceed to assessment in the current SIP round, with 18 still being discussed. Some proposals have been rejected, some resolved into a composite submission and some placed in a pipeline for future SIP rounds. Reasons for this included 1) Not meeting the regional sift criteria, 2) Proposals being insufficiently developed, or key information not available, for immediate assessment and 3) duplication or overlap with other submissions. We will write to partners imminently to share our decisions.

4. Assessment methodology

4.1 The twelve metrics (and high level methodology) for the multi-criteria assessment framework were agreed at the last Board meeting, following several

workshops and discussions with transport and senior officers. These are summarised in the table below:

Sustainable Growth and economy	1.Support the economy to thrive and level up across the whole region, particularly where prosperity is constrained by poor connectivity
	2.Facilitate sustainable visitor access to our key tourism areas
	3.Maintain and improve sustainable access for goods and people to national and international gateways,
Decarbonisation and Air Quality	4.Reduce annual regional transport carbon emissions from 6,250kt CO ₂ e (2019) to net zero by 2050
	5.Minimise embodied carbon
	6.Deliver the infrastructure/conditions/services necessary to prioritise a shift to low carbon modes
Access to services and opportunities	7.Improve access to essential goods, services and opportunities in target areas
	8. Maintain and improve access to important regional and national destinations through our strategic transport networks
Facilitates strategic N-S movements	9.Improve north-south rail and road links between the Midlands and South Coast on identified corridors/routes delivering social and economic benefits & levelling up southern parts of the region
	10.Improve journey time reliability on strategic routes (identified in STP)
Movement of Goods	11.Increase ability for goods moved by road to shift to rail or coastal shipping
	12.Improve HGV facilities on strategic freight routes to increase attractiveness, discouraging running on unsuitable alternatives.

- 4.2 Assessment has now commenced, along with development of an exact scoring methodology. Assessments are due to be completed by 25th October 2024.
- 4.3 Assessment advisory panels on 30th September 2024 and 21st October 2024 will review emerging results and provide guidance on anomalies and uncertainties.
- 4.4 Assessments for Objectives 3 and 8 are being undertaken by modelling officers at West of England MCA, using specialist software. All other assessments are being undertaken by Western Gateway officers.

5. Impact assessments and modelling

- 5.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the highest priority proposals identified in the SIP. A tender process for this work has been completed and the contract awarded to WSP. The cost of the SIP is £34,780.
- 5.2 The Impact assessments are integrated, multi-stage processes, with the final report due by 13th December 2024. This report must accompany the public consultation.
- 5.3 Traffic modelling of the highest priority proposals identified in the SIP will be undertaken in November/December by Dorset Council and WSP. The specification for this is being finalised, but the cost estimates range from £28k - £42k depending on the option selected.

6. Consultation, communication and engagement

- 6.1 The development of the SIP continues to be informed by regular workshops and meetings with partners including Local Authority senior officers, transport officers and data officers, National Highways and Network Rail, including the SIP Board and Assessment Advisory panel.
- 6.2 We also seek advice from other STBs, notably Peninsula Transport, who are developing their own SIP to the same timeframe, although they are taking a different approach in focusing primarily on short term schemes (2-4 years).
- 6.3 Technical consultation on the scope of environmental assessment will be undertaken with statutory environmental bodies (Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England) and National Landscapes in the region.
- 6.4 Public consultation on the draft SIP (including impact assessment reports) will take place in December 2024 and January 2025. An engagement plan for this is currently in development.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment and a Health Impact Assessment is in progress to identify any potential disadvantages to protected groups or impacts on community health and safety.

8. Legal Considerations

- 8.1 The Western Gateway STB remains an informal non-statutory partnership and the STP and SIP are not statutory plans. They are therefore not subject to specific directives regarding sustainability appraisal. We have received advice from DfT that no specific appraisal methodology is expected, but a proportionate approach to be established in consultation with Local Authority partners.

9. Financial considerations

- 9.1 The approved budget for the SIP is £145,000.
- 9.2 The SEA has come in all under the indicative budget amount (£34,780 against a budget of £60,000) although there may be some additional work to do post-consultation.
- 9.3 The modelling may come in slightly over the budgeted amount (£30k) depending on the option selected (estimated range from £28k - £42k), but is still well within the overall budget.
- 9.4 Most of the assessment work is being done in-house or by partner Authorities and with existing or free software, so there is a likely to be a saving against the £15k indicatively allocated for consultancy work.
- 9.5 Overall, the SIP project is likely to come in below the budgeted amount.

10. Risks

- 10.1 The SIP programme has been delayed by several weeks due to four significant factors:
 - 1) Delays to procurement of the consultants to undertake the SEA
 - 2) The SEA development process being more extensive (and with more external dependencies) than originally anticipated
 - 3) Release of tools to be used for assessments being delayed by 3-4 weeks
 - 4) Incomplete information being provided for some proposals, followed by delays in obtaining missing info.
- 10.2 The Western Gateway team has re-profiled the programme to accommodate these delays, and we believe we can just about deliver to the deadline, but there is now absolutely no flexibility left in the programme for further delays and the Project Board have very limited time to turn around revision/approval at each key stage. Any further issues would mean the SIP cannot be delivered to the expected deadline.
- 10.3 An alternative programme (Plan B) is being drafted, but due to pre-election period in WECA from 20th March – 2nd May 2025, this is likely to result in an extensive delay to the delivery date.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 The Board is asked to note progress on the SIP and, in particular, the programme risk highlighted in section 10.

Contact Officer

Hannah Fountain, Senior Transport Officer, Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body.

