

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper A

Date **28th June 2023**

Title of report: **Coach Strategy**

Purpose of report: **To report on the draft Coach Strategy and set out a programme for taking it forward**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve the Coach Strategy.
- II. Approve the programme of interventions as set out in section 4.2.
- III. Delegate the Programme Team and Senior Officers Group to take forward the programme of interventions

1. Background

1.1 Originally it was the intention of the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB) to produce a Bus & Coach Strategy. With the advent of the National Bus Strategy and the requirement for Bus Service Improvement Plans it was decided there was no longer a need for a regional bus strategy so the work was refocused on coaches. Consultants AECOM were commissioned in 2022 to produce a Coach Strategy recognising that coaches are often a neglected aspect of local transport planning but with the potential to play an important role in improving connectivity and decarbonisation.

1.2 The aims of the Coach Strategy are to:

- explore the current state of play of coach service provision and associated infrastructure;
- confirm the key challenges facing coach services in the area; and
- identify opportunities for improvements to coaches, within a framework of the Strategic Transport Plan's objectives and desired long-term outcomes.

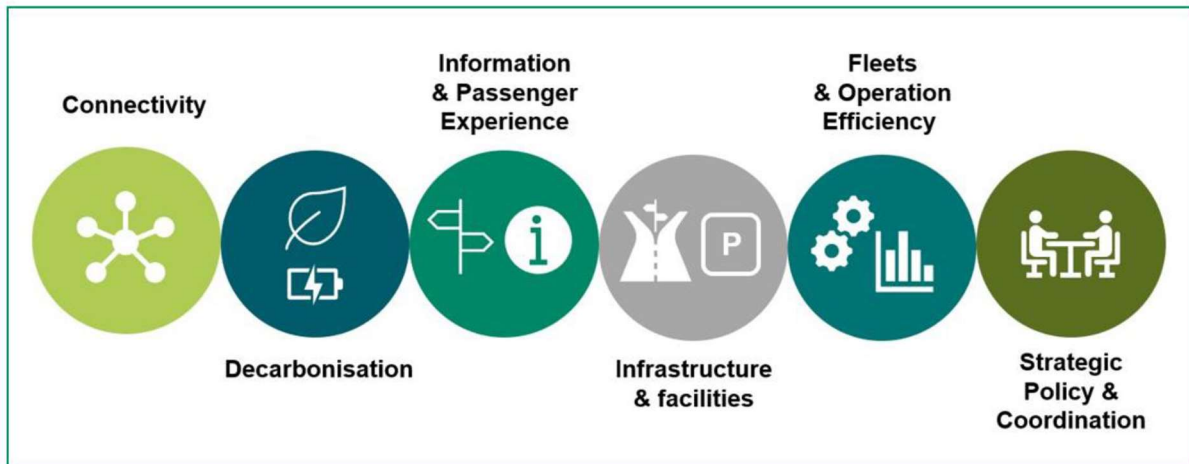
1.3 Data gathered has been used to identify the key challenges facing the regional coach sector and to inform the development of interventions which are designed to mitigate these challenges.

2. Coach Strategy summary

2.1 The full Coach Strategy can be found on the Western Gateway website at:

https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Western-Gateway-Coach-Strategy-Draft_ISSUED-170423.pdf

2.2 Following extensive data collection and research the challenges facing the coach sector and opportunities for change were categorised into six strategic themes, as shown in the diagram below.



2.3 These challenges were then used to identify objectives for the Coach Strategy as set out below to:

1) Improve urban and rural coach connectivity across the Western Gateway including potential new coach routes, increased service frequencies and better integration with other transport modes, to facilitate more sustainable travel and help achieve modal shift from private car.

2) Encourage consistent adoption of new technologies across the Western Gateway.




3) Develop easier and more seamless access to information about services, purchasing tickets and accessing coach services to make coaches a more attractive and inclusive mode of transport.




4) Improve coach stops, interchanges, drop-off and layover parking facilities, including better facilities for drivers, making them more attractive places to wait, rest and interchange.

5) Increase engagement and encourage more coordinated and transparent decision-making and action across the region to support the long-term resilience and vitality of the region's coach sector.

3. Programme of potential interventions

3.1 The Coach Strategy's proposed interventions are set out in the table below grouped under the six strategic themes identified above:

Theme	Proposed intervention
Connectivity 	Explore collaboration between coach companies to service hard to reach areas.
	Work with operators to understand future opportunities for coach travel
	New scheduled coach service addressing strategic gaps: these being: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (1) Bournemouth/Poole/Christchurch-Blandford Forum-Shaftesbury-Warminster-Frome-Bath-Bristol (approx. 68 miles) ▪ (2) Cheltenham-Gloucester-Stroud-Wotton under Edge-Thornbury-Bristol > Bristol Airport (approx. 50 miles) ▪ (3) Cheltenham-Cirencester-Tetbury/Malmesbury-Chippenham-Melksham-Trowbridge > towards Bournemouth/Poole/Christchurch (approx. 95 miles)
	New calling points/interchanges on existing or new routes, such as strategic locations including Cribbs Causeway, additional rural calling points (rural mobility hubs) and parkway interchanges near motorway interchanges on the edges of urban areas.
Decarbonisation 	Baselining carbon impact & setting a Carbon Management Plan for the sector / region
	Assist with identification of opportunities for funding for EV trials/hires.
	Assist with identification of opportunities for funding to support upgrades to cleaner vehicles.
	Support / facilitate development of a network of alternative fuel charging / stations.
	Decarbonisation marketing campaign promoting zero-emission alternatives to the industry.
	Review suitability of technologies from trials and their potential for the South West on an ongoing basis.
Information & passenger experience 	Improve ticketing experience by providing online/app-based payment options
	Live service information (online/app-based) and improve at-stop service information alongside
	Improve branding of services at stops/drop-offs, and wayfinding for travel connections and onward journeys
Infrastructure & facilities	Promote resources and training to help operators avoid bridge strikes.
	Improve experience at off-street & on-street stops and drop off points by providing weather shelter

Theme	Proposed intervention
	Improve safety and security at off-street & on-street stops and drop off by investing in lighting, CCTV and 'help points'
	Support for infrastructure improvements and investment where suitable
	Review of current coach parking facilities in the South West
	Support improvements to strategically important roads that require better journey time reliability.
Fleets & operations 	Review of current driver training and explore options for improvement
	Assist with targeted recruitment campaigns for the coach industry.
	Promote solutions to driver shortages.
	Promoting suitable alternative routes in the event of adverse weather.
Strategic policy & coordination 	Improve data collection so that problems with services can be more easily identified and evidence for opportunities to improve is readily available
	Assist operators with PSVAR legislation
	Assist operators with BODS legislation
	Support/deliver a passenger awareness campaign for coach services incl. opportunities for different user groups.
	Establish and promote a South West Coach Sector Steering Group.
	Partnership working with stakeholders to promote South West priorities.

3.2 It should be stressed that these interventions are not all for the Western Gateway to deliver. Some will be led by the industry and some in partnership with them, local authorities, the Western Gateway and other key stakeholders.

4. Next Steps

4.1 In conjunction with the series of interventions outlined in section 3. above, the Coach Strategy puts forward some recommended next steps:

Passenger experience survey – provide important data on user demographics and journeys and guide future interventions, monitor progress and influence future decision making.

Further engagement with operators - recommended that conducting further engagement with coach operators will guide future interventions and gather feedback on current issues.

Lack of data on coaches - recommended that further research and data gathering is undertaken into the number, type and age of coaches operating in the South West.

Investigation into coach parking across the South West - data gathered for the Coach Strategy has established where the main parking sites are

located but a more comprehensive survey and audit would be required, including of the facilities available.

North – South road network - Coach Strategy has identified weaknesses in the public transport network for north-south journeys and has put forward three potential new coach routes (see Appendix One) which will require further investigations.

4.2 The consultants recommend the interventions related to the Strategic Policy and Coordination theme should be prioritised. Based on this and the value of addressing north-south connectivity issues through the three potential new coach routes it is proposed that the work programme for 2023/24 to 2024/25 will focus on:

- a) Data collection – further research and data gathering undertaken
- b) Passenger awareness campaign for coach users
- c) Set up a South West Coach Sector Steering Group – to follow a similar format to the successful South West Freight Forum
- d) Explore in more detail the potential for the three new coach routes as set out in Appendix One

4.3 It is recommended that the details for the work programme for 2023/24 to 2024/25 are delegated to the Programme Team and Senior Officer Group to confirm.

4.4 It may also be useful to extend the Coach Strategy to cover the neighbouring Peninsula Transport Sub-national Transport Body area as those coaches need to travel through the Western Gateway area to reach many destinations. This will be explored with Peninsula Transport.

5. Consultation, communication and engagement

5.1 Officers from the Western Gateway's constituent authorities, coach operators and other key stakeholders have been engaged in the production of the Coach Strategy. One of the key interventions for going forward is the creation of a South West Coach Sector Steering Group.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 Delivering the Western Gateway's Coach Strategy will open up new travel opportunities and improve accessibility by coach for everyone. No adverse impact on any protected groups is expected.

7. Legal Considerations

7.1 The Western Gateway STB remains an informal non-statutory partnership.

8. Financial considerations

- 8.1 The Coach Strategy was funded from the 2021/22 and 2022/23 budgets. For 2023/24 to 2024/25 a budget of £100,000 is allocated for taking forward the Coach Strategy interventions.

9. Conclusion

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

Appendix One – Potential new coach routes

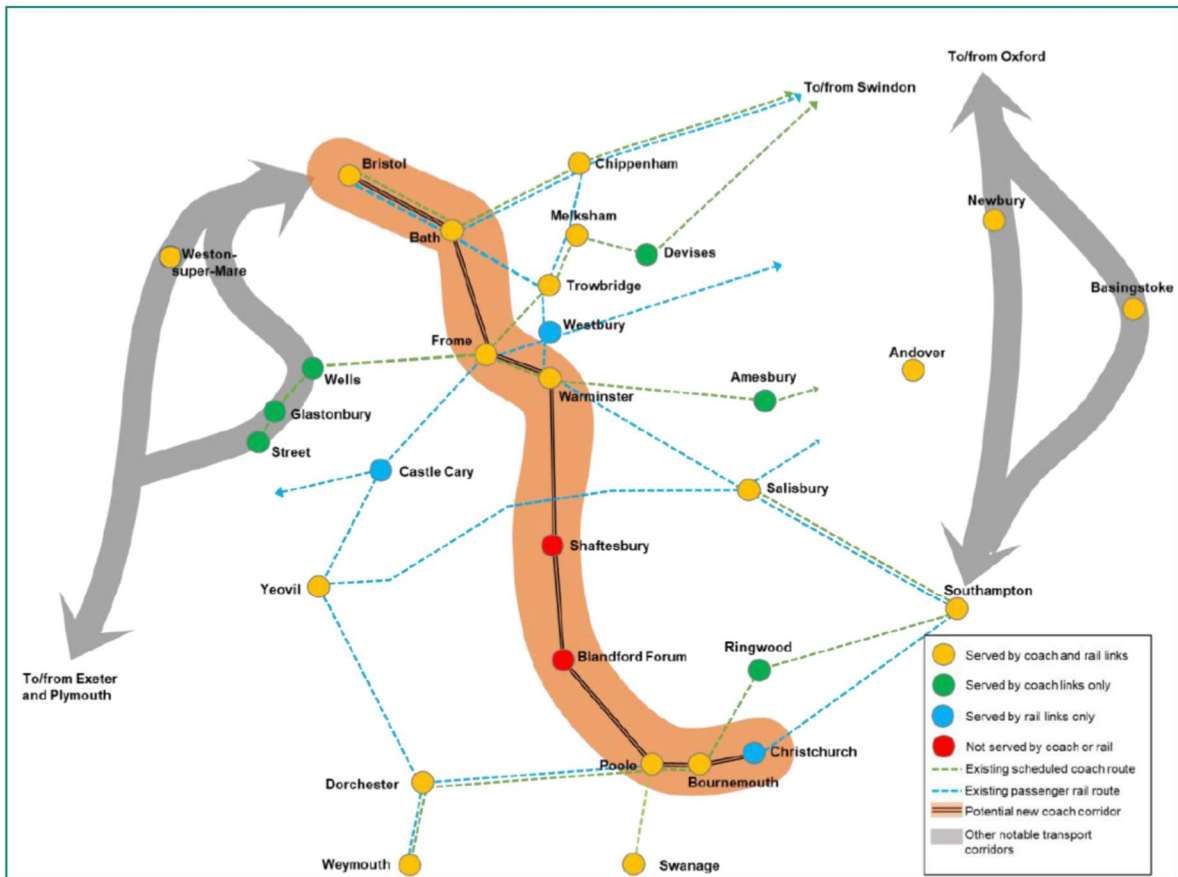
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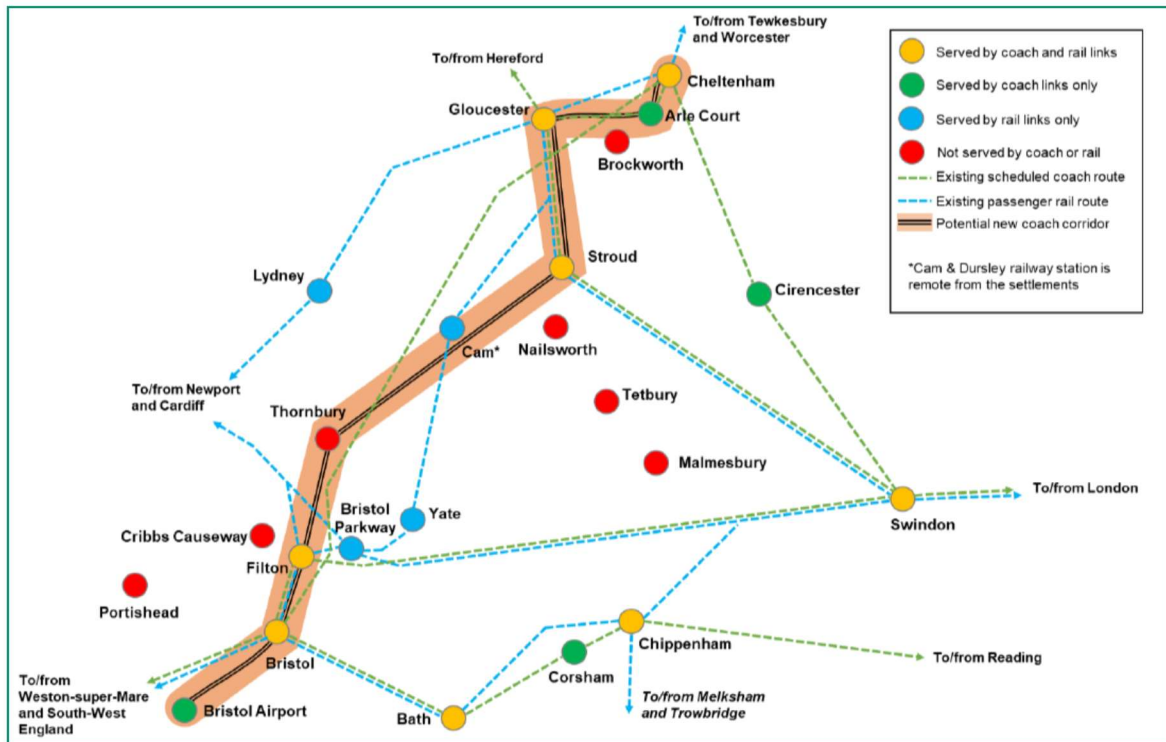
Appendix One

Potential new coach routes

1) **Bournemouth/ Poole/ Christchurch conurbation with Bath and Bristol** - to fill a strategic gap in current public transport provision. The alternative rail routes are in-direct and would require routing either to the west via Dorchester and Yeovil, or to the east via Southampton and Salisbury.



2) **Cheltenham/Gloucester to Bristol** - in particular serving intermediate journeys that are poorly served by direct public transport links, these being Stroud-Bristol (moderate-high levels of car demand), Thornbury-Gloucester (moderate-high levels of car demand), Stroud-Thornbury (moderate levels of car demand) and Wotton-under-Edge -Bristol (high levels of car demand).



3) **Cheltenham to Bournemouth** - strategic gap identified between Cheltenham and Bournemouth, with the northern section shown below. Some sections are served by rail and by coach (including Cheltenham-Cirencester). Smaller settlements that are currently poorly served by public transport like Malmesbury could act as rural mobility hubs to enable people to access coach services using local transport links and active travel routes. An alternative to the route shown would be to route services via Bath, therefore capturing another major attractor location and potentially increasing passenger demand.

