

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

### **Board Meeting**

#### **Paper B**

Date **13<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

Title of report: **Western Gateway Business Plan 2024/25**

Purpose of report: **To set out the Business Plan for the Western Gateway in 2024/25**

#### **Recommendations:**

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve the 2024/25 Business Plan for the Western Gateway as set out in Table One
- II. To note the work areas where funding would have to be reduced should lower levels of funding be awarded
- III. Request a revised Business Plan be brought to the Board should a lower level of funding be awarded
- IV. Agree to the £20,000 annual contribution per authority for 2024/25

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Business Plan set out in Table One follows the requirements in the Department for Transport Business Plan Guidance for Sub-National Transport Bodies, December 2023.
- 1.2 At the 6 December 2023 Western Gateway Board, delegation was given to the Chair and Vice Chair to approve submitting a Business Plan Summary Sheet to the Department for Transport by the end of December 2023. The Business Plan is now presented for approval to the Western Gateway Board on 13 March 2024 for full approval.
- 1.3 As advised by the Department for Transport levels of funding for 2024/2025 are assumed to be those as set out in the Baroness Vere Funding Allocation letter of 21 March 2022 which allocated funding of £896,000 for the Western Gateway. The Western Gateway's constituent authorities' contribution will be £180,000 making a total budget for 2024/25 of £1,076,000.

- 1.4 Baroness Vere’s letter recognised that as a newer Sub-national Transport Body the Western Gateway did not have the same amount of resources or staff as the more established Sub-national Transport Bodies and she wanted to provide the Western Gateway with more funding to bridge this gap and help build our capability. Under this arrangement the Western Gateway should have received £816,000 in 2023/24. The received amount of £605,000 in 2023/24 was effectively a £211,000 cut.
- 1.5 Confirmation of funding for 2024/25 is awaited from the Department for Transport.

## 2. Programme for 2024/25

2.1 The proposed programme for 2024/25 is shown in Table One below.

**Table One: Programme for 2024/25**

Work Area	Specific Workstream	Full funding*	Comment
Strategic Transport Plan (STP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Transport Plan published</li> <li>Strategic Investment Plan</li> <li>Sustainability Appraisal</li> <li>Consultation</li> </ul>	£50,000	Additional funding may be needed to support the Strategic Investment Plan and work areas signposted in the Strategic Transport Plan
Rural Mobility Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selection of rural mobility pilot(s) and partners</li> <li>Support development of business case(s) and new funding models</li> </ul>	£120,000	Funding key to maintaining momentum  Strategic Transport Plan signpost for rural planning guidance
Rail Strategy	Potential schemes for development funding include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heart of Wessex Line</li> <li>Dorset Metro</li> <li>West of England Line</li> <li>Electrification</li> <li>Wiltshire Strategic Rail Study (expected mid 2024)</li> <li>MetroWest to the South</li> </ul>	£170,000	Proposals for 2024/25 will need to be prioritised
Freight Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South West Freight Forum and three sub groups</li> <li>Delivery of interventions as set out in the Strategy</li> </ul>	£100,000	Funding key to maintaining momentum
Alternative fuels for freight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phase 2: Shortlisting of long list of sites</li> <li>Phase 3: Business case development for shortlisted site(s)</li> </ul>	£50,000	Dependent on final version of shortlisting tool from Midlands Connect

Work Area	Specific Workstream	Full funding*	Comment
Electric Vehicle (EV) charging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EV Charging Strategy produced in-house with Peninsula Transport</li> <li>• New EV charging infrastructure tool for LAs to use</li> </ul>	£50,000	Commitment to produce an EV Strategy with the Peninsula Transport
Regional Centre of Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signposted areas of work from the Strategic Transport Plan</li> <li>• Household travel survey</li> <li>• Engagement and workshop programme with the LAs incl. cross-boundary issues and collaboration</li> <li>• Set up a dedicated online support site to provide tools and best practice</li> <li>• Set up a recruitment and training programme</li> <li>• Common Analytical Framework via Transport for the North</li> </ul>	£75,000	Previously deferred in 2023/24 budget
Carbon forecasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition to Carbon Assessment Playbook completed and available for local authority use</li> <li>• Playbook upgrades to include more rural place types</li> <li>• Signposted areas of work from the Strategic Transport Plan</li> </ul>	£50,000	Roll out of Playbook tool to all the local authorities
Business Case Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical, capacity/capability support for developing business cases for LA led STP interventions</li> <li>• Act as critical friend for LA major transport scheme proposals.</li> <li>• Provide regional guidance including spatial development, health and social value</li> </ul>	£50,000	Previously deferred in 2023/24 budget
Coach Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South West Coach Sector Forum</li> <li>• Development of strategic coach routes and other interventions from the Strategy</li> </ul>	£50,000	Funding key to maintaining momentum
Strategic Cycle Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Cycle Strategy as part of the STP</li> <li>• Develop the business case for a selection of key route interventions</li> </ul>	£50,000	Strategic Transport Plan signpost to improve north south routes

Work Area	Specific Workstream	Full funding*	Comment
Other projects, contingency and ongoing costs	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Major Road Network – possible future round of bidding and prioritisation</li> <li>M4 to Dorset Coast Study – taking forward National Highways recommendations</li> <li>Strengthen joint working with the Western Gateway Partnership</li> </ul>	£81,000	Baroness Vere letter advised retaining a reserve to pay for redundancies should the STB be wound up
	<b>TOTAL DfT funded</b>	<b>£896,000</b>	
Local Authority Contributions	Staffing and programme management support**	£180,000	Lead Officer post still to be recruited
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£1,076,000</b>	

\* Full funding as set out in the Baroness Vere letter of 21 March 2022 for £816,000

\*\* Includes Programme Manager, Project Support and Lead Officer (currently vacant). The Technical Lead, Senior Transport Officer and Transport Officer posts and comms support are recharged against individual projects.

### 3. Reduced levels of funding

- 3.1 Subsequent to the submission of the Business Plan Summary Sheet in December 2023 the Department for Transport advised that “until final funding allocations are confirmed, it is prudent for Sub-national Transport Bodies to have plans in place for multiple scenarios, including the funding levels submitted in their business case and a continuation of current funding levels.” In terms of current funding levels that would mean a budget of £605,000 for 2024/25, the same level of funding in 2022/23.
- 3.2 With reduced levels of funding it would be critical to reduce the budgets only slightly on key work areas including rural mobility, the Strategic Transport Plan, freight, rail, EV strategy and coaches. This is to maintain the momentum on existing and committed workstreams. For other workstreams the prospect of greatly reduced or no funding would need to be faced. This will be disappointing to do as some of these were placed on hold last year pending funding for 2024/25. This includes key decarbonisation projects such as Alternative Fuels for Freight Phase 2 and 3 (shortlisting and developing the case for sites for hydrogen refuelling and EV charging stations), developing the Carbon Assessment Playbook tool and taking forward the Cycling Strategy. The planned support for Business Case development for schemes in the local authorities Local Transport Plans may also be an area where work is placed on hold.
- 3.3 Being a Regional Centre of Excellence is a requirement of the Department for Transport. The Western Gateway’s work programme supports the local authorities and contributes to its Centre of Excellence role. More, however, can be achieved and the work programme in Table One sets out new areas to

develop. These support the Strategic Transport Plan and the Strategic Investment Plan. Reduced funding puts this work at risk.

- 3.4 Should reduced funding occur it will mean falling short for a second year in succession in fulfilling our full role as a Sub-national Transport Body. The post of Lead Officer would again be placed on long term hold as it is difficult to justify the salary of the post with a smaller budget.
- 3.5 A revised Business Plan will be brought back to the Board for approval should a lower level of funding be awarded.

#### **4. Consultation, communication and engagement**

- 4.1 The Senior Officers Group, with officers from all the Western Gateway's constituent authorities, has been consulted on the revised programme for 2024/25.

#### **5. Equalities Implications**

- 5.1 Delivering the Western Gateway's programme will open up new travel opportunities, improve accessibility for everyone and contribute to decarbonising transport. No adverse impact on any protected groups is expected.

#### **6. Legal Considerations**

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

#### **7. Financial considerations**

- 7.1 Department for Transport funding for 2024/25 is to be confirmed. The Western Gateway was asked to submit a Business Plan Summary Sheet based on the Baroness Vere letter of 2022 of £895,000. Should Department for Transport funding continue at existing levels this will mean a budget of £605,000 (plus £180,000 contribution from the local authorities). A revised programme will be required.
- 7.2 The nine local authorities provide an annual contribution of £20,000 each to the Western Gateway. It is proposed this contribution remains at the same level for 2024/25 and the Board is asked for its approval.

#### **8. Conclusion**

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

#### **Contact Officer**

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