

**Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body**

**Board Meeting**

**Paper C**

Date **6<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Title of report: **Rural Mobility Strategy**

Purpose of report: **To present to the Board for approval the Peninsula and Western Gateway Rural Mobility Strategy.**

**Recommendations:**

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve the Rural Mobility Strategy.
- II. Officers are delegated to continue to develop the Rural Mobility Strategy to:
  - a. Work with key major stakeholders across the region to secure their support and seed funding for the pilots,
  - b. Identify a shortlist of actual places to act as the pilots to be brought back to the Board for approval.
  - c. Develop a prospectus for the pilots and launch a competition for Expressions of Interest for initial proposals for potential pilots.
  - d. Select from the Expressions of Interest a shortlist of projects to receive initial exploratory STB funding and specialist rural mobility consultancy support to develop the outline business cases for their pilots. Please note the allocation of STB funding is subject to the Business Plan prioritisation exercise.

**Introduction**

- 1.1 The Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB) committed to undertake a Rural Mobility Strategy in 2021/22 as part of the Strategic Transport Plan recognising rural communities face ongoing reduction in passenger transport services and a greater dependency on the private car. Hence the clear need to develop robust rural mobility options.
- 1.2 Following discussions with the Peninsula STB it was recognised there were considerable benefits including taking a common approach, sharing data and saving costs from undertaking the Strategy work jointly. WSP were appointed to undertake the work. The full Strategy can be found in Appendix One.

- 1.3 The overall aim of the Strategy work is to identify the area(s) where rural mobility issues are most pressing develop robust pilot project(s) for them identifying bundles of measures, funding required and a business case.

## **Vision, Strategy and Pilots**

- 2.1 The current approach to rural mobility has not worked for many local communities and economies in the South West. They suffer from disconnection, lack of access to everyday services, poor affordability and restrictions in choice. In facing the climate emergency, rural areas are also, comparatively, higher generators of harmful emissions.

- 2.2 To this end the Strategy sets out a vision for:

*By 2040, rural mobility will have been transformed with the disparity in digital and physical accessibility between our rural and urban places closed. Our targets for net zero will be being met within rural areas through improved access to local services, better active and publicly available travel and the decarbonisation of transport.*

*Our communities and economies will be stronger with better connectivity between rural places as well as with our major urban centres. Communities will be working with public and private sectors to deliver sustainable commercial models which provide practical, and affordable mobility.*

*This transformation will be leading towards a basic universal level of accessibility for our countryside and coastal residents and visitors.*

- 2.3 Backed up by a comprehensive analysis of rural mobility issues the Strategy sets out a framework for delivery built around the following:

- Rural mobility should be underpinned by strong digital connectivity supporting e-commerce and online services, enabling more to be done without the need to travel
- Settlements to support more local services where people need them to strengthen communities and economies and reduce the number and length of journeys
- Integration of activity and mobility, including rural hubs, should be central to our future rural mobility system bringing together better interchange with local community and commercial activity.
- Adapting the 15-minute city concept, networks of settlements should work together to form 30-minute rural communities, supported by improved intra-rural connectivity
- Decarbonised, active and publicly available transport should be central to improving rural mobility, increasing choice and affordability and providing alternatives to single occupancy private car journeys
- Realistically, car and vans will remain vital to many journeys in rural areas, but the sharing and electrification of cars and vans need to be priorities to support those without access to them and meet net zero targets.

- Strengthening larger rural settlements should provide stronger economic drivers of sustainable rural development through greater investment
  - When needs cannot be met locally within rural areas, there should be better strategic connections to larger urban centres by inter-urban bus, coach and rail.
  - Sustainable delivery should be supported through cross-sectoral partnership and funding across the public, private and community sectors.
  - Increasing resilience of mobility networks including generation and security of energy
- 2.4 Piloting new approaches will be a first major step in delivering more for our rural areas. A wide range of potential interventions have been formed into bundles according to which will work best with specific types of rural place (rural towns, villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings). Six types of rural pilots have then been identified to focus on delivering trials of these bundled interventions for different types of rural place. By operating a varied set of pilots there are more opportunities to learn and to develop sustainable models for long term delivery of mobility in rural areas.
- 2.5 The Peninsula and Western Gateway STBs cannot deliver these pilots alone and we look to work with our partners, stakeholders and communities to set those pilots on their way.

### **Next steps**

- 3.1 As set out in section 2.4 the Strategy sets out six pilot types for testing out the bundles of interventions. The Peninsula and Western Gateway STBs will work to secure funding to support the development and delivery of these pilots. This first step will be vital to enabling the launch of a process to secure a number of pilots across the South West. Without initial funding from the STBs, the pilots are significantly less likely to be run. The allocation of funding is subject to agreement with the board on the project prioritisation exercise.
- 3.2 We will work with key major stakeholders across the region to secure their support and seed funding for the pilots, both generally across the South West and within the areas where we consider pilots should be delivered. Stakeholders will include, but not be limited to, DfT, DEFRA, local transport authorities and the major mobility service and transport / energy / digital infrastructure operators.
- 3.3 The next step is to identify and agree actual places to act as the pilots. It is proposed that officers are delegated to draw up the shortlist of places and a report be brought back to the Board for approval.
- 3.4 We will then develop a prospectus for the pilots setting out our proposed approach and the priority areas where the pilots will be delivered. The publication of the prospectus will mark the launch of a competition for initial proposals for potential pilots. We will welcome Expressions of Interest for pilots led by local authorities, the private sector and community organisations

and in partnership with others, to develop and deliver the pilots within our priority areas.

- 3.5 From the Expressions of Interest, we will select a shortlist of projects to receive initial exploratory STB funding and specialist rural mobility consultancy support to develop the outline business cases for their pilots. These outline business cases will be submitted as final bids for STB funding and support. The allocation of funding is also subject to agreement with the board on the project prioritisation exercise.
- 3.6 A final selection of pilots to receive funding from the STBs will be made. Whilst the STBs will provide some of the funding for the pilots, successful bids will need to include other match or contributor funding and resources in kind. Requirements may vary depending on the scale of the proposed pilots and the organisations involved.
- 3.7 It is proposed that officers are delegated to continue developing the next steps for the Rural Mobility Strategy as outlined in sections 3.1 to 3.6 above.

### **Consultation, communication and engagement**

- 4.1 Two stakeholder workshops were held with local authorities and key rural and other transport organisations gaining useful and insightful information and feedback on rural mobility issues. Officers from all the Western Gateway's constituent authorities have been consulted on the draft Rural Mobility Strategy and their comments incorporated into the final version.

### **Equalities Implications**

- 5.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups.

### **Legal considerations**

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

### **Financial considerations**

- 7.1 The Western Gateway's overall budget for 2022/23 to 2024/25 was confirmed on 21 March 2022. A separate report on the agenda sets out the proposed STB programme for 2022/23.

### **Conclusion**

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

### **Appendices**

Appendix One: Rural Mobility Strategy – final version to be added

**Contact Officer**

James White, Technical Lead (Western Gateway STB)

[james.white@westofengland-ca.gov.uk](mailto:james.white@westofengland-ca.gov.uk)