

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper D

Date **11th July 2022**

Title of report: **Delivering the Western Gateway's Rail Strategy**

Purpose of report: **To report findings from the Birmingham to Exeter Network Rail Study and propose next steps.**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Note the findings of the Birmingham to Exeter Rail Study.
- II. Approve taking forward Cheltenham Spa bay platform to Strategic Outline Business Case.
- III. Provide funding through the Three Year Business Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25 for developing the Strategic Outline Business Case for Cheltenham Spa.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body (STB) Board meeting of 19 June 2019 agreed to produce an area wide rail strategy. WSP consultants were commissioned to undertake the work. The final Rail Strategy was adopted by the Board on 16 September 2020.
- 1.2 Initially it was agreed at the Board on 17 March 2021 to allocate £65,000 in 2021/22 for a Station Audit study as part of implementing the Rail Strategy. The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail announced in May 2021 included a National Accessibility Strategy duplicating the work of the Western Gateway Station Audit. So at the Board on 21 July 2021 it was agreed to reallocate the £65,000 for 2021/22 to taking forward the outputs from Network Rail's strategic corridor studies with delegation to the Senior Officers Group to confirm the programme. As the funding for 2021/22 is limited it is intended that a rolling programme of work is set up with funding sought for later years.

2. Rail investment programme

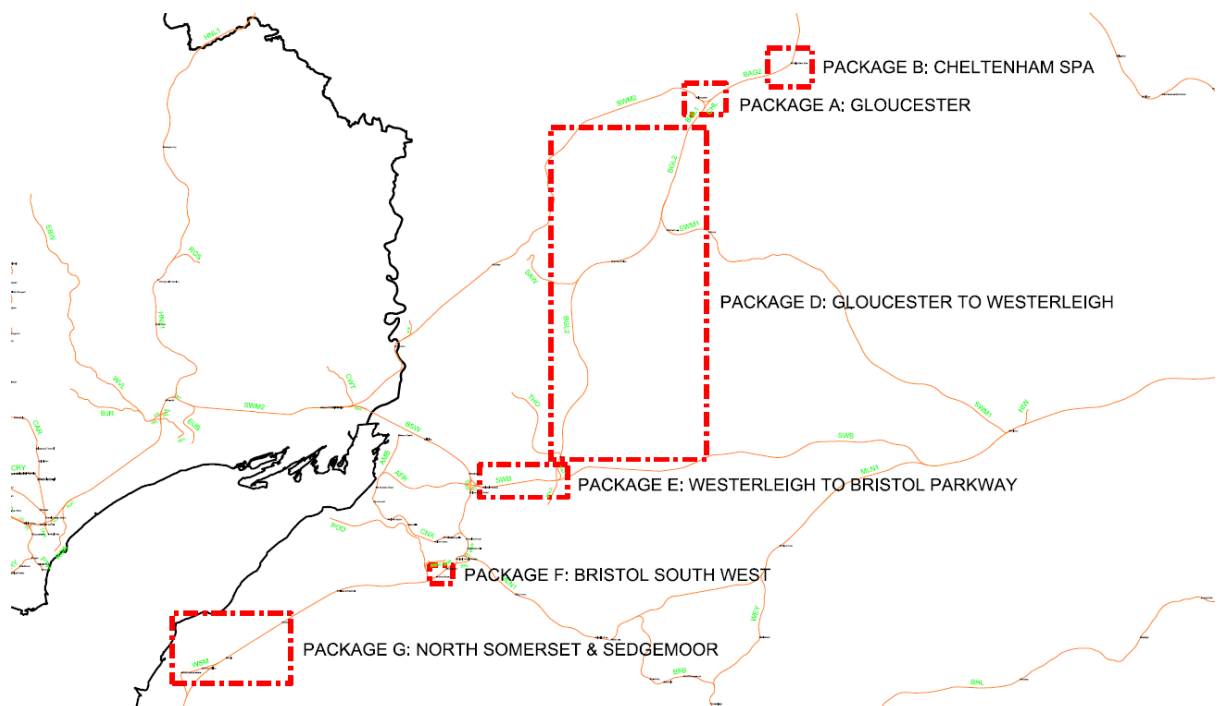
- 2.1 Following discussions with Network Rail three priority schemes from the recently completed Bristol to Exeter and Bristol to Birmingham Strategic Corridor Studies emerged for potential Western Gateway funding. They were:

- Cheltenham Spa station bay platform
- Gloucester station bay platform
- Four tracking between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street stations

2.2 In all cases the extra capacity and performance these schemes provide are the first steps to enabling more frequent services on the Bristol to Birmingham and Exeter corridors.

2.3 Given the limited amount of Western Gateway funding available for 2021/22 and the risk of spreading this too thinly agreement was reached with Network Rail for the Western Gateway funding to focus on a work package for Cheltenham Spa. Network Rail were to fund development work on Gloucester station, four tracking between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street and Worle Junction to Weston-super-Mare. As the schemes are interlinked and central to the Rail Strategy the Western Gateway has been kept informed of progress on the other schemes throughout. Figure One shows the location of the various work package areas.

Figure One: Birmingham to Bristol Work Packages



2.4 A summary of progress to date on the schemes was presented to the Western Gateway Board on 6 April 2022.

3. Final report

3.1 The final report has now been received along with a separate report on options for Westerleigh Junction to Bristol Parkway. As a technical report it

focuses on the engineering requirements, risks, constraints and opportunities for each of the schemes including track infrastructure, signalling, buildings and other infrastructure, Geotech (underlying geology and soils) and power supplies. It stops short of providing a Strategic Outline Business Case with cost figures and Benefit Cost Ratios but it does indicate where there is merit in progressing schemes to the next stage.

3.2 A summary of the report's recommendations is presented in Table One:

Table One: Birmingham to Exeter recommendations

Package	Option	Recommendation
A: Gloucester Area	A1: Parcel Line upgrade	G333 project (PACE Ph2) already exploring this separately
	A2: New east facing bay platform to the rear of Platform 4	Explore alternative opportunities for progression (e.g. broader scope)
	A3: New east facing bay platform to the rear of Platform 1	Explore alternative opportunities for progression (e.g. broader scope)
B: Cheltenham Spa Area	B1: New south facing bay platform approach (excluding Lansdown loop)	N/A as embedded into B3/B4/B5
	B3: New South facing bay platform for 5-car IET	Progress
	B4: New South facing bay platform for 10-car IET	Progress
	B5: New South facing bay platform for 10-car IET (Honeybourne branch alignment)	Do not progress
D: Gloucester to Westerleigh	D1: Extension of Charfield Loops	Not feasible
	D3: Staggered Down and Up Loops	Progress
F: Bristol South West	F1: Bedminster to Parson St 4-tracking	Progress
	F2: Up Main to Up Relief crossover at Parson St	Progress and further define operational requirements
G: North Somerset and Sedgemoor	G7: Weston-Super-Mare bay platform from single line	Progress

4. Individual schemes

Cheltenham Spa – Package B

4.1 Cheltenham Spa is a scheme for a new southward facing bay platform. It came out of Network Rail's Bristol to Birmingham Strategic Corridor Study. The study identifies service enhancements and the infrastructure interventions needed to deliver them but with no timescales or funding.

- 4.2 The Western Gateway funding has enabled designs to be investigated and early development of the business case for the bay platform. The extra capacity it will provide will improve the performance and reliability of the station as well as being the first steps to enabling more frequent services between Cheltenham, Bristol and Swindon and to South Wales.
- 4.3 Two main design options have emerged – one for a 10 or 5 car (carriage) platform adjacent to the existing Platform and the other at an angle to and some distance from the main station on part of the former Honeybourne Line route. The option for an adjacent option is the recommended one to progress as it minimises the interchange required and will not require additional gatelines and other station infrastructure.
- 4.4 The station is not listed and is outside the conservation area within Cheltenham so based on the initial designs it appears that the platform may be able to be delivered under permitted development. It will also require further liaison with GWR due to station change procedures and potential loss of car parking as well as their buy-in for providing any new services. GWR were part of the steering group which endorsed the findings of the Bristol to Birmingham Strategic Corridor Study including the benefits of a new bay platform at Cheltenham

Gloucester Station – Package A

- 4.5 Design work has looked at options for a new bay platform to the south and north of the existing station. There are issues with both options and especially for the impact on the nearby Horton Road level crossing. On the south side the disused side of Platform 1 would be brought into use providing capacity for up to 10 car IET trains. The platform would also be well located for the four trains per hour service between Bristol and Gloucester proposed in the Bristol to Birmingham Strategic Corridor Study. There are issues around the need to provide an incursion barrier due to the close proximity to the A4302 road.
- 4.6 Space is constrained on the north side due to existing sidings and land in external ownership although a short three car (carriage) platform may be possible as a lower cost alternative. Trains to and from Bristol would have to cross all the lines with an impact on other train services into and out of the station. Due to all these reasons the study recommends not progressing any of the schemes for Gloucester concluding wider master plan work including potential remodelling of the whole station is required.

Bristol Temple Meads to Parson Street four tracking – Package F

- 4.7 Four tracking between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street stations will provide part of the additional capacity required to deliver the service enhancements proposed in the Bristol to Exeter Strategic Corridor study. Design work indicates four tracking is possible with Option F1 recommended for taking forward. Stopping trains would continue to use the existing lines through Bedminster and Parson Street stations whilst fast trains would use the new tracks. The schemes do not include bringing the currently unused platform faces back into use. Given the significant interface with the MetroWest proposals for Portishead and the West of England Combined Authority's 10 Year Rail Delivery Plan for MetroWest to the South it is suggested that further development lies best with the Combined Authority.

Weston-super-Mare – Package G

- 4.8 This proposal looked at remodelling Worle Junction, doubling the track from Worle Junction towards Weston Milton and bringing back into use the bay platform at Weston-super-Mare station. This provides increased resilience and capacity for trains running between the London end of the Weston-super-Mare Loop and Weston-super-Mare station. The length of the twin-track section, sufficient to accommodate a 10-car IET, will be defined at the next design phase where a full multi-discipline engineering feasibility study, Operational validation, cost estimation and Value Management is required.

Gloucester to Westerleigh Junction and Bristol Parkway – Package D

- 4.9 Capacity on the line between Gloucester and Westerleigh Junction and from there to Bristol Parkway is a major capacity constraint for enhancing services on the Bristol to Birmingham corridor. Extended and new loop lines to enable slower services to move out of the way of faster ones will enable more frequent and reliable services along the corridor. At Haresfield the proposal is to extend the existing loop on the Upside. In the other Downside direction a new passing loop is proposed between Yate and Wickwar Tunnel.
- 4.10 For Westerleigh Junction to Bristol Parkway Network Rail explored a range of potential interventions to address capacity issues. These included smaller schemes, such as three or four tracking short sections around the junction to large schemes involving grade separation or utilising the nearby freight line to the oil terminal at Westerleigh. The designs developed are at very early concept stage. This would be a major scheme of national significance and impact so this is for the industry and the Government to lead on.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 In terms of next steps there is the option for the Western Gateway to carry on funding development of the Cheltenham Spa scheme to Strategic Outline Business Case. The Three Year Business Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25 under agenda item 7 includes proposed funding for rail with Cheltenham Spa as a potential option alongside other options for taking forward the outputs from the Dorset Strategic Connectivity Study and developing the case for Bristol and the South Coast to Oxford to link up with East – West Rail.
- 5.2 The Western Gateway may wish to consider taking forward development of Worle junction to Weston-super-Mare as part of the Three Year Business Plan.
- 5.3 As Westerleigh Junction is a scheme of national importance and size it is proposed this is left to Network Rail and the Department for Transport to take forward with the full support of the Western Gateway STB. As the West of England Combined Authority has an existing commitment in its 10 Year Rail Delivery Plan for MetroWest to the South it is proposed that the four tracking between Bristol Temple Meads and Parson Street is left to the West of England Combined Authority to take forward.

6. Consultation, communication and engagement

- 6.1 Officers from the Western Gateway's constituent authorities have been consulted on this report and their comments incorporated.

7. Equalities Implications

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

8. Legal Considerations

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

9. Financial considerations

- 9.1 The Western Gateway's overall budget for 2022/23 to 2024/25 was confirmed on 21 March 2022. The cost of the recommended resource approach is set out in Table Four. This is affordable within the Western Gateway's budget.

10. Conclusion

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

Background documents

Birmingham to Exeter Corridor Study, Network Rail, June 2022 – link to be added.

Contact Officer

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