

## Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

### Board Meeting

#### Paper A

Date **25th March 2025**

Title of report: **Strategic Investment Plan final approval**

Purpose of report: **To share the final Strategic Investment Plan and seek approval to publish**

#### **Recommendations:**

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve final Strategic Investment Plan 2025-2035 for immediate publication.
- II. If small updates are required, defer final approval of the document to the SIP Board prior to publication.
- III. Agree date for promotion. Recommend promoting in May, following elections.
- IV. Note recommendations for future action and update

## **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 publication 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 five Key Aims 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 It is further expected that, in due course, the SIP will feed into the government's emerging 10 year transport investment plan and, together with the STP, inform the development of the Integrated National Transport Strategy.

1.4 A SIP Project Board has been established to guide day to day progress, with Cllr Hannah Young as Project Executive and Cllr Chris Wilmore supporting.

## 2. Progress to date (March 25)

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

Item	(Expected) completion date
WGSTB developed proposed set of 12 objectives (related to 5 Aims of the STP) against which SIP proposals would be assessed. Approved at July Board, pending any change requests from members (none received).	Completed 10 <sup>th</sup> July '24
WGSTB developed an assessment methodology for proposals (based on the agreed 12 objectives), supporting information and a proforma for submission. Circulated to Local Authority partners.	Completed 1 <sup>st</sup> August '24
Local Authority Partners submitted proposals for assessment, along with supporting information. 101 proposals were submitted.	Completed 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept '24
WGSTB assessed proposals submitted against the objectives identified. 38 top scoring proposals were identified and compiled into a prioritised list within the SIP.	Completed end Oct '24
Consultants (WSP) conducted Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment of prioritised proposals. An overall positive impact was identified, with some areas of potential harm that will be discussed with scheme proposers for management and mitigation.	Completed Dec '24 and updated Feb '25
Public consultation undertake on draft SIP, along with impact assessments. 733 valid responses received. Consultation report produced.	18 <sup>th</sup> Dec – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Feb
Highways impacts of prioritised schemes modelled. Forecasts align with scheme assessment, indicating an overall positive impact against the key aims of the STP and on the highway network more generally. Some areas of concern identified, which will be discussed with partners for management and mitigation.	Completed 26 <sup>th</sup> Feb '25
Consultation responses, impact assessments and other feedback compiled and the SIP re-drafted in response	Completed 27 <sup>th</sup> Feb' 25
Further engagement with partners. Final draft produced	Completed 12 <sup>th</sup> March '25
Final draft SIP submitted to the Board	18 <sup>th</sup> March '25
Board approval and publication	25 <sup>th</sup> March '25
Promotion and PR	May '25 (tbc)

- 2.2 If further minor changes are required, these will be undertaken after the Board meeting – it is recommended Board members delegate final approval of the document to the Project Board.
- 2.3 The final SIP can be published either immediately after approval or following local elections in some authorities in May, as preferred by members.

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

- 3.1 The development of the SIP has been informed by continuous workshops and meetings with partners including Local Authority senior officers, transport officers and data officers, National Highways and Network Rail throughout the whole programme. Draft versions of the SIP and supporting documents have been shared with all partners at each key stage and feedback used to inform updates and changes. Follow-up and one-to-one meetings have been held as required. A near-final draft of the document was shared with all partners on 27<sup>th</sup> February '24 and discussed in detail at a meeting with officers on 3<sup>rd</sup> March '24. The final draft (presented with this paper) has been updated following final comments following that meeting.
- 3.2 We also sought advice from other STBs, notably Peninsula Transport, who are developing their own SIP to the same timeframe. Their approach and final document closely aligns with ours.
- 3.3 An Assessment Advisory panel, comprising officers from Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Dorset Councils, met on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and 21<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to provide guidance on the assessment approach and outcomes. The assessment approach has been informed by government guidance and/or tools.
- 3.4 Technical consultation on the scope of the environmental assessment has been undertaken with statutory environmental bodies (Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England) and National Landscapes in the region.
- 3.5 Public consultation on the draft SIP (including impact assessment reports) was undertaken between 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024 and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2025. The engagement programme included 5 public webinars, a presentation to the Transport and Business forum and consultation with Dorset Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion reference group.
- 3.6 A detailed consultation report has been produced to respond to all key issues raised. This can be seen at <https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/sip25-consultation-report/>. Following publication of the SIP, this report will be shared with all consultation respondents.
- 3.7 The majority of the project has been undertaken in-house, by Western Gateway officers and partners, with the exception of the sustainability appraisal, transport modelling and graphic design.

3.8 Regular progress updates have been presented to members at Board meetings in July, October and November 2024, with guidance/approvals sought as appropriate.

#### **4. Equalities Implications**

4.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment and a Health Impact Assessment undertaken as part of the Sustainability Appraisal. This identified a net positive benefit on health and accessibility for people with protected characteristics or who experience barriers to opportunity or access. Some specific impacts were also identified – these have been noted in Section 8 of the SIP and will be referred to scheme proposers for mitigation and management.

#### **5. Legal Considerations**

5.1 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 content or appraisal. The SIP makes no assurances regarding the deliverability or cost of proposals and makes it clear these have not been assessed independently and are the responsibility of scheme owners during full business case development.

#### **6. Financial considerations**

6.1 The approved budget for the SIP was £145,000. The project has come in under budget, at around £110,000 (final invoices awaited).

6.2 This includes specific costs as follows:

- Sustainability Appraisal £34,780
- Modelling £67,000
- Consultation portal and engagement £950
- Graphics design including short promotional video - £5,430

#### **7. Future commitments**

7.1 Since work on the SIP commenced, there has been a change of national government. As well as announcing five new missions for transport, the new Labour government has cancelled some significant planned transport schemes, commenced production of an Integrated National Transport Strategy, revised the National Planning Policy Framework and targets for housing delivery and is conducting a comprehensive spending review. While the full outputs and impacts of these are still uncertain, they are likely to lead to changes in future transport provision, prioritisation and funding.

7.2 In response to these expected future changes, we recommend that both the STP and the SIP be reviewed in approximately 12 months' time (exact timeframe to be confirmed in relation to national government developments) to ensure alignment with these emerging priorities and local options for delivery of planned growth through the Local Plan process. This recommendation is outlined in the

SIP document and, with the agreement of the Board, should be incorporated into the business planning for the 25/26 and 26/27 financial years (dependent on future funding settlements).

- 7.3 Further recommendations for future reviews and actions are outlined in sections 11 and 12 of the SIP. These include potential areas for advocacy at a national or pan-regional level.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 The Board is asked to approve the final version of the SIP, presented alongside this paper. If small changes are required, it is recommended these are deferred to the Project Board for final approval prior to publication. Advice from WECA's Legal team and Monitoring Officer indicates that there are no concerns regarding immediate publication of the report as it is considered business as usual. They do recommend an apolitical approach is taken to communications.
- 8.2 It is recommended that we delay promotion of the SIP until after the local elections in May, to avoid pre-election issues and can work with all our LA partners to coordinate promotion.
- 8.3 The Board is also recommended to review and approve the recommendations for future updates and actions, including the potential allocation of resources to undertake these actions in future financial years.

### **Contact Officer**

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