

# Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

## Board Meeting

### Paper F

Date **25 March 2025**

Title of report: **Technical Programme Progress update**

Purpose of report: **To provide a progress and delivery update on the ongoing work to deliver the technical work programme of the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body.**

#### Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- To note the progress of the programme update report.
- To note the technical work that has been delivered in 2024/25

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report contains an update on the progress of a number of elements of the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body (STB) technical work programme and the work that has been delivered in this financial year. In this year's Business Plan, we outlined our plans to delivering core work areas, with a focus on creating impact for both our local authorities and the government. We are pleased to report that we have successfully achieved nearly all of our priority objectives.

#### April – June 2024

- Develop and launch of the Strategic Transport Plan (STP)
- Launch of the South West Coach Forum
- Delivery of the 8<sup>th</sup> round of Freight forum (Sub groups and main group)

#### July – September 2024

- Develop Rural Mobility Pilot Programme Prospectus.
- Complete feasibility study of first of three priority routes identified in the Coach Strategy
- Complete work on modelling future transport scenarios

**October – December 2024**

- Produce Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for Heart of Wessex Line
- Develop the EV Strategic Action Plan
- Completion and roll out of EV Charging Infrastructure tool via TfN
- Final version of Alternative Fuels for Freight tool released via Midlands Connect
- Commence work on phase three of Coach Strategy
- Release the Carbon Assessment Playbook to LAs, with over 150 subscribers.
- Produce Wiltshire Strategic Rail Study

**January – March 2025**

- Completion of Intervention Assessments report for Dorset Metro
- Service enhancements feasibility work commissioned with Basic Services Agreement signed for West of England Line
- Completion of the Bristol to Oxford 'Case for Change' document for new rolling stock.
- Finalise the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP), including the Sustainability Appraisal.
- Finalise grant funding agreements with the selected organisations.
- Finalise Regional Centre of Excellence Hub
- Finalise Strategic Cycle Network

***Ongoing work that is set to be completed in the next financial year*****April – May 2025**

- Finalise production of reports and guidance to support LAs to meet the new housing requirements with minimal disruption and impact on the region's transport network.
- Finalise feasibility report of the West of England Line
- Finalise delivery of Freight awareness workshops and workshops report
- Finalise Active Travel, social value and health guidance as part of Centre of Excellence
- Finalise updated version of Coach (phase 2) feasibility study report.
- Completion of Coach Parking survey/report for phase 3 work

**2. Freight Strategy Implementation and freight forums**

- 2.1 Context: Work undertaken jointly with Peninsula Transport. Phase 2 efforts resulted in a monitoring report outlining the achievements following the publication of the Freight Strategy, available on our website. The report highlights the continued success of the Freight Forum and progress on key

interventions, including work on the impact of bridge strikes, lorry parking and facilities, a backloading trial, shifting freight to rail and maritime, and drone delivery engagement with UWE.

- 2.2 Work to Date: The freight forums (3 sub-groups and the main forum) has been continuously maintained with a focus on fostering a broader range of engagement. Forum meetings have been coordinated and taken place in Autumn and Winter. The 8<sup>th</sup> round of the road, rail, maritime and aviation sub-groups were held successfully last year/early this year, with the coordination of the main forum ongoing. Series of freight awareness workshops ongoing with local authority officers and councillors enhancing understanding of industry needs and challenges and highlighting the key levers available to local authorities to influence positive change. This work is expected to complete in Spring 2025, with support from consultants. Rural freight ideas workshop with local authorities is also being coordinated to explore the potential for alternative ways to deliver freight in rural areas as well as discussions around multi-modal rail freight terminal study under preparation for site(s) at Avonmouth.
- 2.3 A further update on next steps on production of learning materials tailored to the needs of Local Authority officers and councillors, with short informative guides, resources, and case studies. Production of workshop report which is a summary of the main findings and insights provided by attendees as well some recommendations to take forward will be shared with the Partnership Board at the next meeting.

### **3. Rail Strategy**

- 3.1 Dorset Metro: Development of the strategic outline business case for an extra train per hour Dorset Metro shuttle service between Wareham and Brockenhurst with possible extension to Swanage and the provision of a clock-face service between Weymouth and London Waterloo is in progress, with work expected to be completed in Spring 2025. The Intervention Assessments report for Dorset Metro has been completed. The invoicing and payment process within procurement management is currently in progress.
- 3.2 West of England Line (Tisbury Loop): Development of the strategic outline business case for a half hourly service between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction is in progress. Examining the case for four potential options; two trains per hour to all stations via infrastructure enhancements, Skip-stop (omit station calls at Tisbury, Templecombe, and Sherborne), and focus on performance benefits of a Tisbury Loop extension without the associated service level increase. Basic service agreements have been signed with Network Rail, and the feasibility report is currently being reviewed, with work expected to be completed in Spring 2025.
- 3.3 Heart of Wessex Line: Work is continuing to develop the business case for hourly services with Network Rail. Preferred option will be skip-stop (Chetnole and Thornford only one train per two hours) and will require a new loop between Castle Cary and Yeovil Pen Mill.

- 3.4 Bristol to Oxford: Production of the Bristol to Oxford 'Case for Change' document for new rolling stock is completed and published on the WG website in partnership with NR, EEH and GWR.
- 3.5 A further update on the development of various workstreams will be shared with the Partnership Board at the next meeting.

#### **4. Electric Vehicle Charging**

- 4.1 Both Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport STBs identify decarbonisation and the transition to zero-emission vehicles as a priority within their respective transport strategies, which has led to collaborative working across the South West region. It involved setting up a South West EV forum for local authority officers, and to publish an EV Strategic Action Plan for the South West which identifies tangible measures the STBs can undertake to support the accelerated delivery of regional EV charging infrastructure.
- 4.2 The STBs undertook an analysis on EV uptake, electric vehicle charge point requirements and demand across the region up to 2050. The findings and full report were published on the STB websites. The establishment of a successful EV South West forum, to support the Local Authorities (LAs) is ongoing and well attended by officers from all LAs and external stakeholders, such as Energy Saving Trust, to identify the issues and opportunities in delivering the required infrastructure and electrical grid capacity to meet forecasted demand. The first EV forum of the year was held on 19<sup>th</sup> of February with various discussions on EV/LEVI bids. The next forum is planned for March 26<sup>th</sup>. There will be continuous engagement with private sector ChargePoint operators to understand the opportunities and challenges within the EV industry.

The EV Charging Infrastructure Tool which was developed by Transport for the North on behalf of all STBs has been completed and rolled out to all LAs. A framework session which included a live demo of the tool was held on 12<sup>th</sup> of February which showed the useability of the tool as well as an opportunity for LAs to ask questions. A further update on the progress of the EV work package will be given at the next Partnership Board Meeting.

#### **5. Coach Strategy**

- 5.1 The feasibility study of first of three priority routes identified in the Strategy is substantially complete. However, imminent changes to the coach service provision to Bristol Airport and the removal of Megabus routes materially changes the operating environment and business case assessment already undertaken, so this is now needing to be further reviewed before publication. The updated version of the feasibility study report is produced and currently under review by WG officers.

- 5.2 The coordination of the Southwest Coach Sector Forum is ongoing, with engagement including local authorities, coach operators, CPT and National Highways. The next forum is scheduled for March 11th with a presentation on the Economic Impact of Coaches, relevant to the South West area, the developments at the airport including plans for growth and the new public transport interchange, presentation on the Bath to Bristol A4 Airlink service, Bath City Tours and local operations and a presentation giving an overview of Flix's planned network developments in the South West, with reference to their offer connecting to Bristol Airport. There will be an opportunity to an optional tour to Bath's coach drop-off points and discussions around parking arrangements for vehicles in the city.
- 5.3 The phase 3 of the Coach work is focused on a) coach parking and facilities, including site surveys and audits, b) surveys with drivers and passengers and c) feasibility assessment of priority routes 1 and 3 from the Strategy. AECOM has been commissioned to continue the work they have been undertaking through a direct award. Draft Strategic Gap Corridors report on the scheduled coach service case studies has been produced and being reviewed by WG officers. Revised programme and invoicing schedule produced within procurement management.

## **6. Alternative Fuels for Freight**

- 6.1 In March 2022 Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport STB jointly commissioned Atkins, with their industry partner CENEX, to undertake a study to consider the barriers and opportunities associated with the transition of freight vehicles to alternative fuels. The study adopted a methodology successfully applied in a similar study for the Midlands Connect STB.
- 6.2 A site ranking tool has been developed by Midlands Connect to shortlist potential refuelling locations. The DfT provided additional capacity funding to Midlands Connect to roll out this function and undertake this work for all STBs. The tool can be used to test range of potential locations and the criteria can be adjusted to reflect the rurality of the Western Gateway areas. The advisory tool combines a mapping function with demand forecasting to indicate when sites will be needed.
- 6.3 The tool and accompanying dashboard are now developed and will be made available for Local Authorities to feed into Local Plans and Local Transport Plans. Tool is now available for all Local Authorities. Consideration will be given by Western Gateway to supporting the delivery of potential sites through business case development and working with stakeholders and operators in the next financial year and will be tied as a workstream under Freight work package.

## **7. Regional Centre of Excellence work**

- 7.1 Western Gateway's new Transport Model has now been completed. We have used the model to provide an analysis of possible future road traffic levels and distribution across the region, based on four different growth and behaviour scenarios (Common Analytical Scenarios). Results were shared with officers and members to help inform future thinking and planning. A written report is being developed which will be shared with members.
- 7.2 Western Gateway's Carbon Assessment Playbook is now available for use by partners. Series of workshop sessions and follow-up support sessions for officers and members were held as a way to best support our LAs in the useability of the tool.
- 7.3 New tools, including DfT's Connectivity Tool and Local Transport Carbon Infrastructure Benchmark Tool, have been delayed and now expected in spring. Western Gateway will be providing introductory sessions for partners and are exploring options to participate in a pilot study using the Connectivity Tool to inform local plan making.
- 7.4 AECOM commissioned on the work to support the revised housing forecast.1) Development of Health, Physical Activity and Social Value evaluation guidance/tool, 2) Production of high level review of the new housing requirements and their impact at a Western Gateway wide level and 3) Production of Regional Spatial Planning Guidance for identifying the best possible locations from a region wide transport and connectivity perspective. Local Authorities engagement workshops held to better understand current progress and issues faced by partners, and regional focus of the CoE work.
- 7.5 A draft report summarising housing requirements at a regional level is ongoing. Interim workshop to review draft proposed Regional Planning Guidance and Interchange Guidance being coordinated and an overview of final outcomes following workshops to be developed.
- 7.6 Establishing working partnership with universities around the region aimed at enriching the field of transportation planning and providing valuable opportunities for students and graduates – This workstream started with having 3 students from Gloucester university on placement, with one student currently on placement. WG officers are invited to Careers Fair at Gloucester University in March where there will be further engagement with students as well as exhibition of our ongoing work and raising the profile of the STB. Discussions are ongoing with other universities in the region to strengthen and expand partnerships across the area.

## **8. Rural Mobility**

- 8.1 The South West Rural Mobility Strategy was developed in partnership with Peninsula Transport. One recommendation from the strategy was to develop a

series of rural mobility pilot projects to test innovative approaches to improving sustainable access to services in rural areas.

- 8.2 A Prospectus for the programme was produced, offering external organisations the opportunity to bid for up to £50,000 to develop proposals for a rural mobility pilot project. Following the WEMCA's due diligence process and the approval of grant allocations, subject to committee approval, the Western Gateway will support the successful applicants in securing full delivery funding for the project.
- 8.3 The call for pilots went live on 25th October 2024, with deadline for application on 8th December 2024. A total of nine submissions were received, with three from Peninsula Transport and six from Western Gateway. After a review by nominated board members and Western Gateway officers, three organisations stood out strongly and were selected to receive £20,000 each in funding. To accommodate this, £10,000 was reallocated to ensure all three organisations were successfully funded. These selected organisations completed the due diligence process, and the WEMCA Grant Assurance Team confirmed they met all financial eligibility requirements. The WEMCA Committee delegated the grant allocation decision to the Director of Strategy, in consultation with Unitary Authority Directors, and the funding has now been officially approved.
- 8.4 Work is currently underway to finalize grant funding agreements with the selected organisations within this financial year, enabling them to commence rural mobility pilot projects in the South West. An update on the progress of the pilot projects will be brought to the next Partnership Board Meeting.

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

- 9.1 This update has been discussed by the Programme Management Team and approved by the Senior Officer Group.

## **10. Equalities Implications**

- 10.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups

## **11. Legal considerations**

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

## **12. Financial considerations**

- 12.1 The technical programme is produced within the allocated budget as spelt out in the business plan.

## **13. Conclusion**

13.1 This paper provides a summary of the various element of the Western Gateway technical programme of work and the progress made since the last board meeting as well as the work that has been delivered in this financial year . The Board is recommended to note the progress that has been made with the various workstreams.

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