

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper B

Date **25th March 2025**

Title of report: **Revised Western Gateway Business Plan 2025/26**

Purpose of report: **To approve the revised Western Gateway Business Plan for 2025/26**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve the Business Plan for 2025/26 as set out in Table One.
- II. Agree to the £20,000 annual contribution per authority for 2025/26.
- III. Approve the appointment of a Data Officer and an additional Transport Officer as set out in Table Three.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the end of August 2024 the Department for Transport (DfT) sent guidance on preparing Sub-national Transport Body (STB) Business Plans for 2025/26. Approval for submitting the Western Gateway Business Plan was given by the Board on 2 October 2024.
- 1.2 In December 2024 the DfT wrote to all STBs offering the opportunity for submitting revised Business Plans by 21 January 2025. This was to feed into the DfT's internal business planning process. The DfT's advice was to use the same format as the interim business plans.
- 1.3 The deadline of 21 January 2025 meant it was not possible to receive Board approval for the final Business Plan as the next scheduled meeting was not until 25 March 2025. Approval to submit was sought from the Western Gateway Senior Officers Group and the Chair and Vice Chair with retrospective approval by the Board on 25 March 2025.

2. Programme for 2025/26

- 2.1 The revised Business Plan is set out in Appendix One with a summary in Table One below. Revisions focus on strengthening the references to how the programme contributes to the Government's missions and priorities.

- 2.2 In line with the guidance it was assumed the levels of funding are the same as 2024/25. Funding from the DfT for 2025/26 has now been confirmed at £816k with a total budget of £996k (£816k from the DfT and £180k from the constituent authorities). This budget will allow the Western Gateway to continue to develop the programme set out in 2024/25 with a part time Lead Officer now in place.
- 2.3 Funding is focused on taking forward for delivery key elements of the Strategic Transport Plan, rail, rural mobility, freight and coach work and providing capability and capacity for the local authorities through the Regional Centre of Excellence. No new strategy work is planned.
- 2.4 For each workstream the budget figures are generally lower which reflects taking more of the work in-house through investing in and employing additional staff. It is proposed to employ an additional Transport Officer and a Data Officer -see section 3. and Table Two.

Table One: Programme for 2025/26

Work Area	Specific Workstream	Budget
Programme management and staff costs	Core Team: Part time Lead Officer, Technical Lead, Senior Transport Officer, Transport Officer, Programme Manager, Project Support Officer. Comms to be fully brought in house. Additional Transport Officer and a Data Officer to be recruited.	£421k
Strategic Transport Plan (STP)	12 month review of Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) and Strategic Transport Plan (STP)	£80k
Rural Mobility Strategy*	Further funding for selected rural mobility pilots to deliver proposals	£60k
Rail Strategy	Development funding for Westbury Platform 0 and Heart of Wessex Line and Dorset Metro development work to Full Business Case	£100k
Freight Strategy*	Continuation of South West Freight Forum, rail terminal work and extension of backloading trial	£50k
Electric Vehicle (EV) charging*	In-house take forward actions from the EV Strategic Action Plan	£1k
Regional Centre of Excellence **	1) Signposted areas of work from the STP including further development of regional guidance and support for the Integrated National Transport Strategy 2) Buses - to assist local authorities on working across boundaries 3) Continued development of transport tools including the Carbon Assessment Playbook and EV Infrastructure Charging Tool	£60k
Coach Strategy	Continuation of South West Coach Sector Forum and business case development for Strategic Coach corridors	£50k
Cycling	Contribution towards developing the business case for a selection of key cycle route	£20k
Contingency***	Reserve to pay for redundancies, winding up of the STB and general contingency	£141k

Work Area	Specific Workstream	Budget
Business Operations costs	Website, Board meetings, conferences and travel	£13k
	TOTAL	£996k
Funding		
Department for Transport		£816k
Local Authority Contributions		£180k
TOTAL		£996k

Notes:

* Rural mobility, freight, alternative fuels for freight and EV charging are all joint projects with Peninsula Transport STB.

** For Regional Centre of Excellence work the £60k is for consultant support. The majority of the work will be undertaken in house by appointing a new Transport Officer and Data Officer.

***DfT Business Plan guidance recommends funding is held in reserve to cover redundancy and winding up costs.

2.5 As required by the DfT alternative proposals for a 20% uplift and a 20% decrease in the budget were included in the submission. With funding now allocated for 2025/26 at 2024/25 levels these are no longer relevant.

3. Western Gateway Funding Allocation 2025/26

3.1 On 24 February 2025 the Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander wrote to the Western Gateway confirming the funding allocation for the STB of £816,000 in 2025/26. This is to be welcomed. Going forward the Secretary of State asks the STB to focus on three key areas. These are set out in Table Two along with how the Western Gateway's programme for 2025/26 supports them.

Table Two: Government ask for the STB to focus on

Focus	Western Gateway programme for 2025/26
Delivering a pan-regional approach through developing regional transport strategies	Revised Strategic Transport Plan and Strategic Investment Plan. Take forward EV Action Plan (with Peninsula Transport). Support for the Integrated National Transport Strategy. Continuation of South West Freight and Coach Forums.
Focusing on pan-regional connectivity and integration	Developing business case for rail proposals, strategic cycle routes and Strategic Coach corridors. Rural Mobility pilots. Rail terminal work and extension of backloading trial.
Supporting local authorities' capacity and capability through providing access to STB modelling and analysis tools and expertise	Regional Centre of Excellence (RCOE) incl. further development of regional guidance and on buses to assist local authorities on working across boundaries. Carbon Assessment Playbook, Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure and ALFFI (Alternative Fuels for Freight Infrastructure) tools.

	Western Gateway Strategic Transport Model. New Data Officer to support RCOE work with local authorities.
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4. Additional Staffing

- 4.1 The programme for 2024/25 has proved challenging to fulfil within existing staff resources. External consultants have been required to provide support and particularly for the Regional Centre of Excellence work. For 2025/26 it is proposed to bring more of the work programme in house with the recruitment of an additional Transport Officer and a Data Officer. Table Three sets out the key tasks these two posts will undertake.

Table Three: Additional staff resources for 2025/26

Post	Key roles	Cost pa
Transport Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To lead on two key elements of the Regional Centre of Excellence work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buses - assist local authorities on working across boundaries, bus franchise and enhanced partnership proposals to help integrate and coordinate services across the region. ○ Signposted areas of work from the Strategic Transport Plan including support for the INTS. • Support the STP and SIP review. 	£41k
Data Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the review and development of the STP and SIP including use of the Western Gateway Strategic Transport Model. • Support the Regional Centre of Excellence work programme • Responsible for the collection, collation, management and analysis of transport and demographic data including GIS. • Provide technical support for the WG's analytical tools including the Carbon Assessment Playbook. 	£36k
	TOTAL	£77k

- 4.2 This investment in staff will reduce the dependency on consultants and ensure full value for money. With more in house resource and less reliance on consultants funding for the Technical Programme has been adjusted. Comms support to be brought in house. The cost of the two posts can be met from within the programme budget.
- 4.3 The Board are asked to approve the appointment of a Data Officer and an additional Transport Officer.

5. Consultation, communication and engagement

- 5.1 The Senior Officers Group, with officers from all the Western Gateway's constituent authorities and the Chair and Vice Chair, has been consulted on the Business Plan for 2025/26.

6. Equalities Implications

- 6.1 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.

7. Legal Considerations

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

8. Financial considerations

- 8.1 Department for Transport funding for 2025/26 has been confirmed at £816k. This is the same level as for 2024/25. The nine local authorities provide an annual contribution of £20k each to the Western Gateway. It is proposed this contribution remains at the same level for 2025/26 and the Board is asked for its approval.

- 8.2 The total budget for 2025/26 is £996k.

- 8.3 The West of England Combined Authority following Board approval in March 2020 remains the accountable body.

9. Conclusion

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

Appendix One : Draft programme for 2025/26 and how it meets the Government's new priorities

Contact Officer

James White, Technical Lead Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Appendix One : Draft programme for 2025/26 and how it meets the Government’s new priorities

Work Area and delivery against the Government’s missions	Specific Workstream	Funding
Staffing		
Programme management staff costs	Core Team and seconded officers costs Note: For 2025/26 it is proposed to bring more of the work programme in house with the recruitment of an additional Transport Officer and a Data Officer. This investment in staff will reduce the dependency on consultants and ensure full value for money. The focus of the additional staff will mainly be on the Regional Centre of Excellence. With more in house resource and less reliance on consultants funding for the Technical Programme has been adjusted. Comms support to be brought in house.	£420,632
Technical programme		
Strategic Transport Plan <i>- support kickstarting economic growth and NPPF housing requirements</i> <i>- breakdown barriers to opportunity</i> <i>- transforming infrastructure to work for the whole country</i> <i>- support proposals for new combined authorities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 month review of Strategic Investment Plan including support for and role of committed and still in development schemes including National Highways RIS3 and non-infrastructure proposals. • 12 month review of Strategic Transport Plan including strengthening the commitment to kickstarting economic growth and supporting local authorities to meet NPPF housing requirements. Review to reflect and support the changing devolution landscape with emerging combined authorities and the Integrated National Transport Strategy. • Strategic Transport Model work to support the 12 month reviews • Modelling work to support local authorities revised housing figures • Modelling work to support business case development for SIP schemes (subject to funding) 	£80,000
Rural mobility strategy <i>- promoting social mobility and tackling regional inequality</i> <i>- breakdown barriers to opportunity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further funding for selected rural mobility pilots - new pilots and further support for existing ones (awarded funding in 2024/25). • Strategic Transport Plan signpost for rural planning guidance – work with LPAs to develop guidelines around rural development, connectivity and local service provision/support. 	£60,000

<p>Rail strategy - <i>promoting social mobility and tackling regional inequality</i> - <i>better integrating transport networks</i> - <i>supporting rail reform and working regionally</i></p>	<p>Schemes for development funding are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wiltshire Rail Strategic Study - Westbury Platform 0 Strategic Outline Business Case • Heart of Wessex Line development to Full Business Case • Promotion of Dorset Metro and West of England Line work (SOBCs completed in 2024/25) <p>Work regionally with Great British Railways, Peninsula Transport and emerging MCAs on future rail services and plans and devolution.</p>	<p>£100,000</p>
<p>Freight incl alternative fuels - <i>supporting economic growth and transforming infrastructure</i> - <i>delivering greener transport</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of South West Freight Forum (joint with Peninsula Transport) • Rail freight terminal(s) feasibility/business case work • Extension of back loading trial to more operators • Rural freight delivery pilots • Alternative Fuels for Freight Phase 3: Business case development for shortlisted site(s) following use of ALFFI tool 	<p>£50,000</p>
<p>Electric Vehicle charging - <i>delivering greener transport</i> - <i>help make Britain a clean energy superpower</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take forward actions form EV StrategicAction Plan (joint with Peninsula Transport) • Continued support for Local Authorities on the new EV Charging Infrastructure tool 	<p>£1,000</p>

<p>Regional centre of excellence - <i>provide capability and capacity for our LAs</i> - <i>work across boundaries and regionally</i> - <i>improving bus services and growing usage and support the Bus Services Bill</i> - <i>support for devolution proposals</i> - <i>promote social mobility</i> - <i>Support for the Integrated National Transport Strategy ensuring transport is joined up, accessible and sustainable</i></p>	<p>Additional resource for RCOE work will be provided through recruiting a new Transport Officer and a Data Officer. The £60k budget is for technical support. The focus for RCOE will be on three key areas:</p> <p>1) Signposted areas of work from the Strategic Transport Plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Further development of regional guidance (2024/25 programme) incl. spatial development, interchanges and ensuring accessibility is designed in as standard building a safer and more secure network for all o ‘Travelling Less’ – review approaches to pricing, reallocation of road space, parking policy and provision and produce a strategy with recommendations for the local authorities. To link to and support the INTS. <p>2) Buses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o To assist local authorities on working across boundaries, bus franchise and enhanced partnership proposals to help integrate and coordinate services across the region. o To work with local authorities on establishing common access standards for bus stops. <p>3) Continued development of tools for transport and QCR and sharing/training LA partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Common Analytical Framework via Transport for the North o Carbon Assessment Playbook o EV Infrastructure Charging o DfT Connectivity tool (piloting) o Strategic Transport Model 	<p>£60,000</p>
<p>Coach - <i>promoting social mobility and tackling regional inequality</i> - <i>delivering greener transport</i> - <i>integrating transport networks</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of South West Coach Sector Forum • Business case development for Strategic Coach corridors 1 and 3 • Take forward recommendations from the coach facilities and parking survey work on 2024/5 	<p>£50,000</p>

<p>Cycling - <i>delivering greener transport</i> - <i>promoting active, safe and healthier travel</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution towards developing the business case for a selection of key cycle route interventions from the Strategic Cycling Network study ensuring walking and cycling are the best choice for some journeys. Match funding from partners will be sought. 	<p>£20,000</p>
<p>Contingency budget</p>	<p>Reserve to pay for redundancies and general contingency.</p> <p>Depending on funding received and spend across the technical budget the contingency budget may be used to bring forward work on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake household travel survey • Business case development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Provide development funding for SIP schemes o Act as critical friend for LA major transport scheme proposals. • Monitor and evaluate the benefits to local authorities and key stakeholders of the RCOE work. • M4 to Dorset Coast Strategic Study (when published) – review of opportunities and approach 	<p>£141,522</p>
<p>Sub Total</p>		<p>£983,154</p>
<p>Business Operations cost</p>	<p>Website hosting and maintenance, Board meetings, conferences and travel</p>	<p>£12,846</p>
<p>Total</p>		<p>£996,000</p>