

## **Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body**

### **Board Meeting**

#### **Paper B**

Date **25<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Title of report: **Rural Mobility Pilots update and decision**

Purpose of report: **Information on recent progress on Western Gateway's Rural Mobility Pilots and decision on allocating Lead Member for next call for pilots**

#### **Recommendations:**

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Note progress on the current Rural Mobility Pilot projects
- II. Allocate a Lead Member for Rural Mobility and delegate approval to produce and distribute a Call for Pilot Prospectus this financial year and allocated approval for the decision on successful applications.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The [South West Rural Mobility Strategy](#) was developed in partnership with Peninsula Transport STB in 2022. One recommendation from this strategy was the development of a series of rural mobility pilot projects to test novel approaches to improving sustainable access to services in rural areas.
- 1.2 The Board approved £60,000 funding in 2024/25 to deliver three pilots in the region. This was matched by contributions from Peninsula Transport for a pilot in their region.
- 1.3 A further £60,000 has been allocated this FY (2025/26) and was approved in the business plan in the March 2025 Board meeting. STB officers across the two STBs (Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway) are planning to do another call for pilots later in summer 2025 and are requesting a decision be made on allocating a Lead Member to oversee the process and decision.

## **2. Current progress**

- 2.1 Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport carried out a call for rural mobility pilots throughout Autumn 2024, further details on the process can be found on the Western Gateway website here - [100k for Rural Mobility Pilot Schemes - applications now open! - Western Gateway](#). In total, nine submissions were received across the whole of the South West. Following an assessment

completed by officers from both STBs in November 2025, and final approval from Cllr Reay and Cllr Willmore, a decision was made to award £20,000 each to three pilots in the Western Gateway region. Final approval from the STBs accountable body, the West of England Combined Authority, was granted in mid-February 2025 and the grant letters were signed for all three in March 2025.

## 2.2 Details on the three pilots who were successful in the previous call for pilots in the Western Gateway region and have now commenced can be seen below:

### 1. **Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership – Enhancing Access to Rural Spaces**

A community - led research and engagement initiative exploring how Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) can support access to free-to-access green spaces across the South Cotswolds and Vale of Berkeley region. Targeting youth and underserved communities, the project team will work alongside Nailsworth and Dursley groups to develop travel confidence resources including a "Let's Talk DRT" booklet, and will recommend ideas for inclusive, low-carbon access to rural spaces via the next generation of DRT. The project will engage local communities, develop accessible transport information, and provide insights for the future of UK DRT.

The marketing materials are expected in November 2025, and the final report to summarise the outputs of focus groups is due February 2026.

### 2. **Forest of Dean District Council – Low-Carbon Shared Mobility Club**

A pilot introducing low-carbon car hire, e-bike hire, and shared transport in the Forest of Dean. A Mobility Hub in Coleford and an E-Bike Hire location will launch in Spring 2025, with findings helping shape a wider network of shared transport options.

The electric Hiyacar is due to be delivered and installed later in June 2025. Progress continues to be made on the e-bike provider. Progress report is due September 2025.

### 3. **Bridport Town Council – West Bay Weekend Shuttle Bus**

A low-cost, frequent weekend bus service between Bridport and West Bay to enhance community mobility and reduce car dependency. Running up to every 30 minutes, the service will improve access to local facilities, coastal attractions, and residential areas, supporting both residents and visitors.

Bus service is due to launch later in June 2025, depending on final approval from the Traffic Commissioner. Final report due Spring 2026.

## 2.3 Peninsula Transport STB awarded funding to one pilot last financial year:

### **The Bodmin & Lanivet Rural Community Bus Scheme**

A pilot project to create a sustainable community-led transport network. Coordinating three community buses, it will deliver regular, reliable routes and hireable services to connect rural villages, local amenities and key services in the vicinity of Bodmin. The funding will enable a full-time coordinator to be employed to run the service. It is intended that the scheme will go some way to address rural mobility challenges, reduce the reliance on private vehicles, and promote the use of equitable low carbon transport.

- 2.4 At the March 2025 Board Meeting, the Board approved the 2025/26 business plan, which allocates a total of £60,000 to fund additional rural mobility pilots this Financial Year (FY). Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport STB will conduct another call for pilots for organisations to submit proposals, which will be assessed following the same methodology as the current pilots.
- 2.5 Due to the nature of the project requiring continued engagement, Western Gateway are seeking a Lead Member who has delegated powers from the Board to oversee the 25/26 call for pilot and has final approval on the next successful pilots.

The expected timings for next phase are:

- Launch the call for applications July 2025
- Application deadline set for end of September 2025
- Review and make a decision on 'winning pilots' October 2025
- Seek approval from the West of England Combined Authority as the accountable body December 2025

The two STBs will plan to official launch the next phase of pilots in early 2026, following the application process, to take into account any lessons learnt from the current phase one pilots (as stated in section 2.2)

- 2.6 An outline of the Prospectus approach can be seen in Appendix 1

### **3. Request for approval**

- 3.1 Western Gateway officers request delegated authority from the Board to a Lead Member for the Call for Pilot application process and assessment of applications received to award funding of up to £60,000 (as approved in the current Business Plan) to successful bidders.

### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1 We aim to distribute the Call for Pilots to interested parties before December 2025. An application form and engagement strategy are currently being developed.

### **5. Equalities Implications**

- 5.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups is expected.

### **6. Legal Considerations**

- 6.1 Western Gateway will be awarding funding to external organisations, which may include charitable organisations, community groups and/or private enterprises as well as Local Authorities. We therefore have an obligation to exercise due diligence in the selection of a suitable recipient and to ensure good value for money is secured.

- 6.2 We will look to the West of England Combined Authority, as our accountable body, to provide oversight on this matter, and we will comply with all necessary processes and requirements to ensure this is achieved.

## **7. Financial considerations**

- 7.1 Budget for this work element has already been approved as part of the 2025/26 Business Plan.
- 7.2 It is an ambition of this work that additional external funding will be secured for the delivery of pilot mobility projects in rural areas.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 Board members are asked to note this update agreed the recommendations.

## **Contact Officer**

Hattie James, Transport Officer, Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

## Appendix 1: Outline Prospectus Content

[The prospectus](#) sets out a vision to make our rural areas more 'liveable' and adopts the concept of 'liveable rural communities' as the central focus. Essentially this aims to enable residents and visitors in a rural area can access their daily needs locally, affordably and reliably, whilst striving to achieve Net Zero.

The document identifies six 'grand challenges' that are seen as the major barriers to achieving liveable rural communities. These challenges are shown below in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 – Rural Mobility 'Grand Challenges'*

The expectation for the prospectus and associated pilot projects is that they should aim to address at least one of these challenges as part of their scope and solution.

The prospectus process identifies ten pilot concepts to provide applicants with practical examples of projects. These are detailed within the prospectus, and include projects related to tourism, accessibility, safety, decarbonisation and freight. The concepts vary significantly in their focus and their ambition. With the funding currently available, it is likely that only one or two of the ten concepts, with match funding and resources, will be practical to deliver.