

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

### **Board Meeting**

#### **Paper B**

Date **17 September 2025**

Title of report: **Major Road Network Review**

Purpose of report: **To update the Board on the Department for Transport review of Major Road Network schemes**

#### **Recommendations:**

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve the signing and sending of the draft letter of support in Appendix A for the three Western Gateway Major Road Network schemes under review to the Under Secretary of State for Transport.

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Under Secretary of State for Transport, Lillian Greenwood wrote to all local authorities with Major Road Network (MRN) and/or Large Local Major (LLM) schemes on 8 July 2025 setting out proposals to review the schemes submitted in 2018. One of the first actions of the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB) was to prioritise MRN and LLM schemes across the region for submission to the Department for Transport (DfT).
- 1.2 Whilst nationally some schemes have been delivered there are 70 which are either in development or have made limited progress. As the Under Secretary of State points out when schemes were first included in the MRN programme in 2019 a condition of the funding was that they should all be under construction by April 2025.
- 1.3 The good news for the Western Gateway is that three of its region's schemes will continue. They are:
  - A350 Chippenham Bypass Improvements Phase 4 and 5 - Wiltshire Council
  - A38 North Somerset - joint North Somerset and Somerset Council
  - A350 M4 Junction 17 Improvements - Wiltshire Council
- 1.4 Nationally, however, the DfT has identified 42 schemes which will be reviewed to determine whether they remain viable (are there other solutions), affordable

and deliverable (construction to start by March 2029). Three of these are in the Western Gateway region and they are:

- Junction 9 M5 – Gloucestershire County Council
- A4174 Roundabout Improvements – South Gloucestershire Council
- A350 Melksham Bypass – Wiltshire Council

- 1.5 The DfT intend to undertake the review of MRN schemes by the autumn of 2025. It should be recognised there is a clear intent to reduce the number of schemes on the MRN list and there will be cancellations. Furthermore the previous Government's commitment to meet 100% of costs will not be honoured as it was not funded and Local Authorities will still have to meet increased scheme costs that result from inflationary pressures.

## **2. Continued support for the three schemes in the Western Gateway**

- 2.1 A questionnaire has been sent to all promoting Local Authorities with a deadline of 12 September 2025. The DfT has indicated they will hold 1:1 discussion after this date. All three promoters of schemes in the Western Gateway have indicated they wish to continue with their schemes. Background to the schemes, their benefits and continued justification has been provided by the three authorities as summarised below.

### **Junction 9 M5**

- 2.2 Gloucestershire County Council has reaffirmed that the Junction 9 M5 scheme remains a priority. Gloucestershire has sections of single carriageway Strategic Road Network (SRN) roads with safety, congestion, and severance of communities as ongoing issues, which include the A46 corridor. The A46 is a key strategic route connecting the South West with East Midlands from the M5 J9 at Tewkesbury, Ashchurch. This is a priority route within the context of the regional and national road network, with its links to economic growth, HS2, and international gateways to ports and airports. Addressing these challenges is a high priority for Gloucestershire County Council, Western Gateway STB and Midlands Connect.
- 2.3 The M5 Junction 9 scheme is in line with the Western Gateway long-term Strategic Transport Plan and the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP). The SIP recognises the M5 Junction 9 scheme of regional significance that received approval and committed funding from government investment programme and is now awaiting key decisions. The Strategic Outline Business Case for the scheme has been with the DfT since 2022 for assessment and work continues to develop the Outline Business Case. The scheme supports achievement of the 'improve safety for all outcomes' identified in the route strategy for the South Midlands.

## **A4174 Roundabout Improvements**

- 2.4 The A4174 forms a key part of the MRN and links north Bristol with the M32 and M4. It also acts as an important link between existing and planned residential and commercial developments such as the Brabazon development. South Gloucestershire Council's (SGC) MRN scheme at Abbeywood on the A4174 has evolved significantly since being accepted onto the MRN programme. Initially (pre 2020) SGC had been considering a large highway engineering solution, aimed primarily at improving flow conditions for motorists.
- 2.5 The pandemic meant scheme development was paused and was picked up again in late 2022. At that point it became apparent that traffic flows had changed considerably, and the initial scheme proposal was no longer required. In 2024 SGC subsequently developed a revised MRN scheme costed at £16.37m which will significantly improve active travel routes around the North Fringe of Bristol by improving pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure and accessibility within the scheme area.
- 2.6 The preferred scheme option comprises the following measures:
- Major Work at/near MOD Roundabout including a "landmark" grade separated pedestrian/cycle crossing at Concorde Way.
  - Works at Coldharbour Lane, including an extended right turn lane
  - Minor Works in the study area including new signalised pedestrian crossings
- 2.7 The Scheme improvements are expected to absorb some of the trips generated by new developments within the area, as well as accommodating some of the car journeys displaced on the network by the potential Eastville Viaduct works over the M32 (scheduled to run up until early 2030's). As a result of reduced congestion on the road network, there is expected to be modest improvements to journey time reliability for all modes including bus services.

## **A350 Melksham Bypass**

- 2.8 Wiltshire Council have reaffirmed that the A350 Melksham Bypass remains a priority. While the scheme was previously placed on hold pending the outcome of the M4 to South Coast Strategic Study, the publication of the study now provides a timely opportunity to re-engage with the DfT on corridor priorities.
- 2.9 The current alignment of the A350 creates severance within the town of Melksham, separating much of the community from the railway station and retail opportunities. The heavily urbanised route is subject to congestion that result in traffic delays, impeding economic viability and the delivery of sustainable transport. The bypass will provide a diverted route for the A350 to the east of Melksham and deliver upon the aims of local policy and the M4 to Dorset Coast: Strategic Study.

- 2.10 The proposed improvements to the A350 at Melksham, costed at £238m in 2021, are critical to unlocking and supporting housing growth both locally and in the wider area. Approximately 31,500 new homes could be delivered along the A350 corridor (including Chippenham, Trowbridge, Westbury, and Warminster) between 2016 and 2036. Complementary walking and cycling measures will reduce the east-west severance effect of the A350. This will result in a better-connected walking and cycling network for Melksham and encourage greater use of these modes.
- 2.11 The A350 has now been confirmed as the preferred north-south route between the M4 and south coast following National Highways M4 to Dorset Coast Strategic Study. This creates greater reliance on the A350 as a corridor and the need to improve pinch points such as Melksham. With the route now being promoted as the strategic route there becomes a greater need to improve the A350 through Melksham. Wiltshire Council welcome the opportunity to discuss with the DfT on aligning strategic priorities for the A350 corridor. In parallel, they are working collaboratively with National Highways and neighbouring authorities to develop a comprehensive 'corridor delivery plan.'

### **3. Draft letter to the Secretary of State**

- 3.1 Whilst there is no official role for the Western Gateway in the MRN review the Board is asked to give its support for the three MRN schemes based on the justification set out in section 2. This is incorporated into the draft letter of support to the Under Secretary of State for Transport in Appendix A. The Board are asked to approve the signing and sending of the letter.

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

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

### **5. Equalities Implications**

- 5.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups. All three MRN schemes will provide new facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and wheelers.

### **6. Legal considerations**

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

### **7. Financial considerations**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications for the Western Gateway arising from this report.

## **8. Conclusion and recommendation**

- 8.1 The Board is asked to approve the signing and sending of the draft letter of support in Appendix A for the three Western Gateway Major Road Network schemes under review to the Under Secretary of State for Transport.

## **Appendix One: Draft letter to the Under Secretary of State**

### **Contact Officer**

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## **Appendix One**

### **Draft letter to the Under Secretary of State for Transport**

Dear Under Secretary of State

#### **Western Gateway support for Major Road Network schemes**

One of the first actions of the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body was to prioritise Major Road network (MRN) and Large Local majors (LLM) schemes across the region for submission to the Department for Transport. We welcome, therefore, the inclusion of three of the Western Gateway regions Major Road Network schemes for continued development through to Full Business Case and construction. The schemes are:

- A350 Chippenham Bypass Improvements Phase 4 and 5 - Wiltshire Council
- A38 North Somerset - joint North Somerset and Somerset Council
- A350 M4 Junction 17 Improvements - Wiltshire Council

Three other schemes in the region are included in the Annex B list to be reviewed to determine whether they remain viable, affordable and deliverable. They are:

- Junction 9 M5 – Gloucestershire County Council
- A4174 Roundabout Improvements – South Gloucestershire Council
- A350 Melksham Bypass – Wiltshire Council

The Western Gateway wishes to express its continued support for all three schemes. Collectively and individually they are critical to unlocking and supporting housing growth.

For the Junction 9 M5 and A350 schemes they support wider improvements at a regional level with the A350 Melksham Bypass being a key component of the recently published M4 to South Coast Strategic Study. For Junction 9 the A46 is a key strategic route connecting the South West with the East Midlands. This is a priority route within the context of the regional and national road network, with its links to economic growth, HS2, and international gateways to ports and airports

All three schemes will significantly improve active travel routes by improving pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure and accessibility.

Support for the three schemes has been reconfirmed by the Western Gateway Board at its meeting on 17 September 2025. A copy of the Board report which contains more detail about the schemes is attached for your use and information.

Yours sincerely

Chair of the Western Gateway sub-national Transport Body