

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper D

Date **17th September 2025**

Title of report: **Regional Centre of Excellence Programme update**

Purpose of report: **To provide a progress and delivery update on work relating to the Regional Centre of Excellence**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- To note the progress of the Regional Centre of Excellence work
- To note the technical work that has been delivered so far and plans for imminent delivery and promotion of new tools
- To support the submission of our Spatial and Transport Planning tool for a national award (with WSP)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report contains an update on the progress on the Regional Centre of Excellence (RCoE) workstreams. It is being presented as a separate, more detailed report to the regular Programme Update because of the extent and significance of the work.
- 1.2 Our RCoE programme delivers on one of government's three priorities for STBs in 2025/26 - Supporting local authorities' capacity and capability through providing access to STB modelling and analysis, tools and expertise. It also responds to requests from our local authority officers and members for WGSTB to support with the delivery of new housing to meet increased national targets
- 1.3 The Board approved a budget of £60k for this work in the current financial year. This report also includes some work undertaken in Q4 of the previous FY.

2. Regional Centre of Excellence website

- 2.1 In June 2025, we created a new password-protected section of our website to host resources for our LA partners. This overcomes historic problems for some authorities accessing our SharePoint site and provides a better platform for organising and sharing those resources. <https://westerngatewaystb.org.uk/rcoe>

- 2.2 The new site enables us to effectively host a new Analytical Library of technical resources and guidance on behalf of DfT. This library will be updated biannually and will provide a one stop shop for up to date government information for our partners.

3. Health, Physical Activity and Social Value Tool

- 3.1 Working with consultants AECOM, WGSTB have developed a spreadsheet tool to support local authorities to evaluate proposals against 10 indicators of health, physical activity and social value:

1. Access to Health and Social Care Services and Other Social Infrastructure
2. Access to Open Space and Nature
3. Air Quality, Noise and Neighbourhood Amenity
4. Accessibility and Active Travel
5. Crime Reduction and Community Safety
6. Access to Healthy Food
7. Access to Work and Training
8. Social Cohesion and Inclusive Design
9. Minimising the Use of Resources
10. Climate Change

- 3.2 The tool suggests sources of qualitative and quantitative evidence to support each evaluation.

- 3.3 The intention is that this assessment can be used to support business case development (especially non quantifiable contributions) and scheme planning and sustainability appraisal.

4. Interchange Guidance

- 4.1 Also with AECOM, we have developed guidance around the provision of transport interchanges in different place types and for different purposes.

- 4.2 It includes worked examples of potential interchange hubs at locations in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and North Somerset.

- 4.3 The document is going through its final revision and will be available on our RCoE webpage shortly.

5. Spatial and transport planning tools to support housing growth

- 5.1 WGSTB has developed two tools bringing together land use constraints with accessibility and connectivity assessments, to support a consistent, vision-led approach to housing growth.

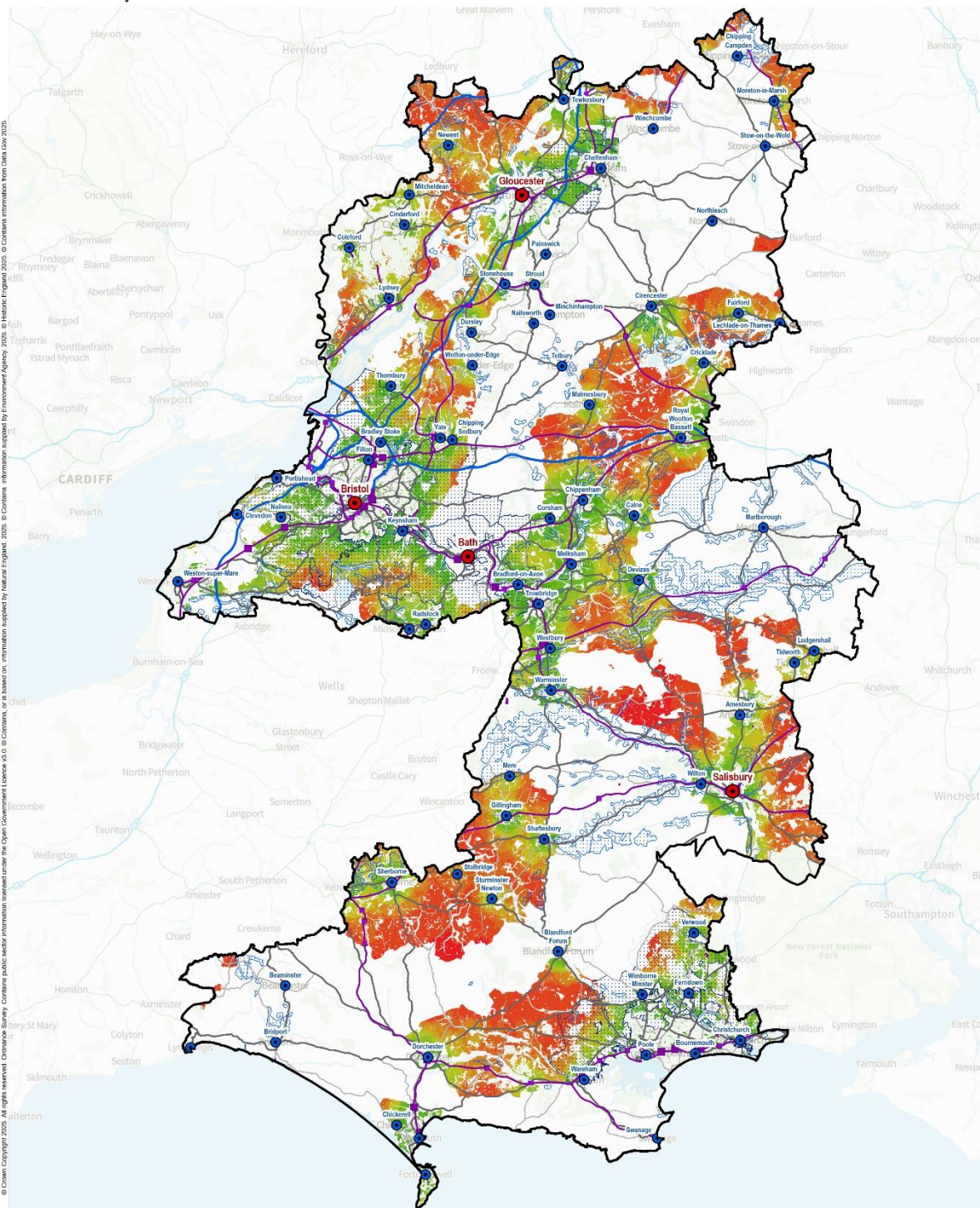
- 5.2 These tools have been informed by an ongoing series of workshops with both transport and land use planning officers from the LTAs and LPAs over the last 6 months or so.

5.3 Land suitability assessment for strategic growth sites

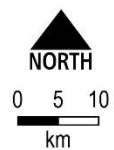
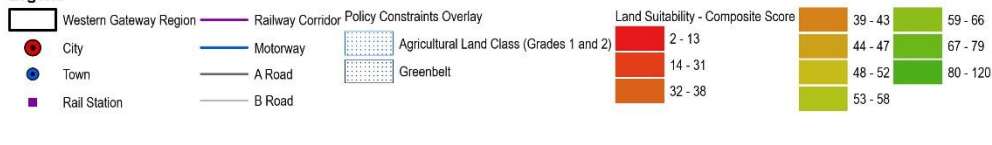
- 5.3.1 The first tool is a Land suitability assessment, aimed identifying broad areas suitable for potential strategic growth sites of 1000+ homes alongside core infrastructure and services, and/or neighbourhood extensions of 500-1000 homes.
- 5.3.2 An Opportunities Analysis assesses accessibility of areas against a framework of indicators reflecting the six Principles of Good Growth:
- 1) **Well-Connected:** Have effective public transport within the town itself as well as links to wider transport networks and support cycling and walking.
 - 2) **Business Creation, Growth & Employment Opportunities:** Provide jobs for residents and enable businesses to grow, supporting the government's economic growth mission.
 - 3) **Healthy & Safe Communities:** Promote healthy lives, providing communities with easy access to parks and nature.
 - 4) **Social Infrastructure:** Focus on building thriving communities, ensuring access to good schools, cultural and sporting facilities, healthcare and hospitals to ensure new residents have the facilities they need from the outset.
 - 5) **Balanced Communities:** Provide a diverse range of high-quality housing with a range of housing types to suit the needs of a balanced community, including affordable housing and homes for social rent.
 - 6) **Environmental Sustainability:** Support climate resilience and biodiversity and be ambitious in meeting environmental targets, meaning cleaner air, more parks and green spaces that are better for wellbeing.
- 5.3.3 A Constraints Analysis assesses barriers to development, such as flood risk, Designated Landscapes etc.
- 5.3.4 Map outputs from these analyses can then be brought together and overlaid to guide areas of search for strategic growth.

Land Suitability - Combined Composite

Western Gateway



Legend

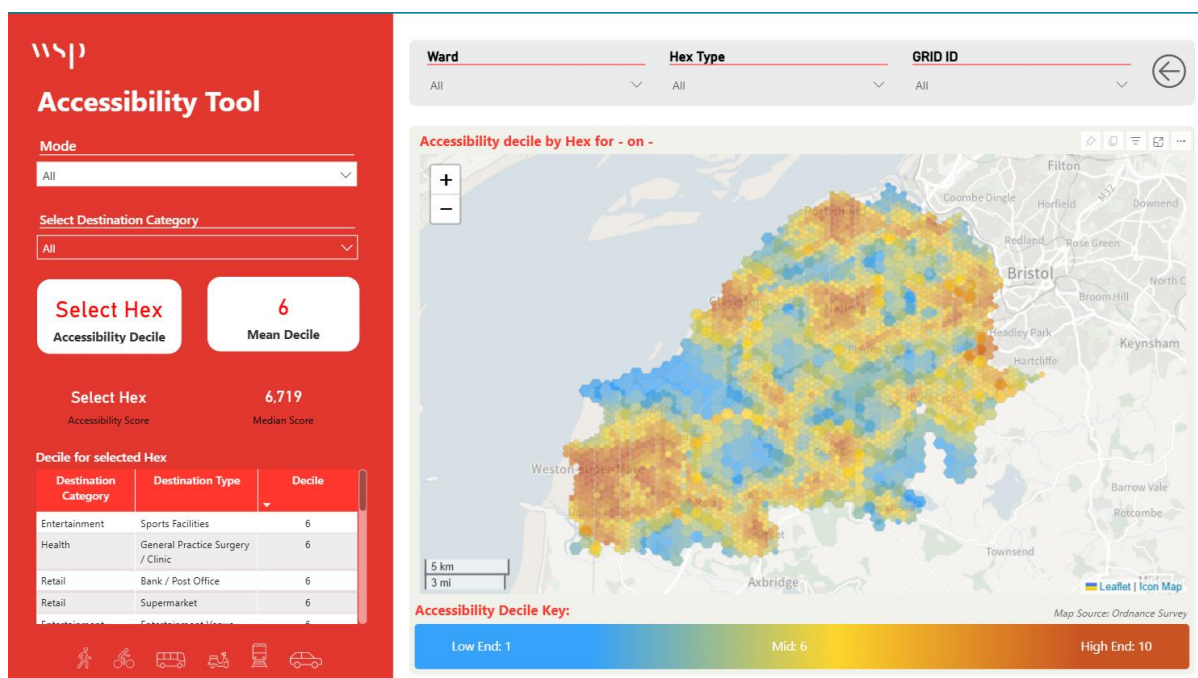


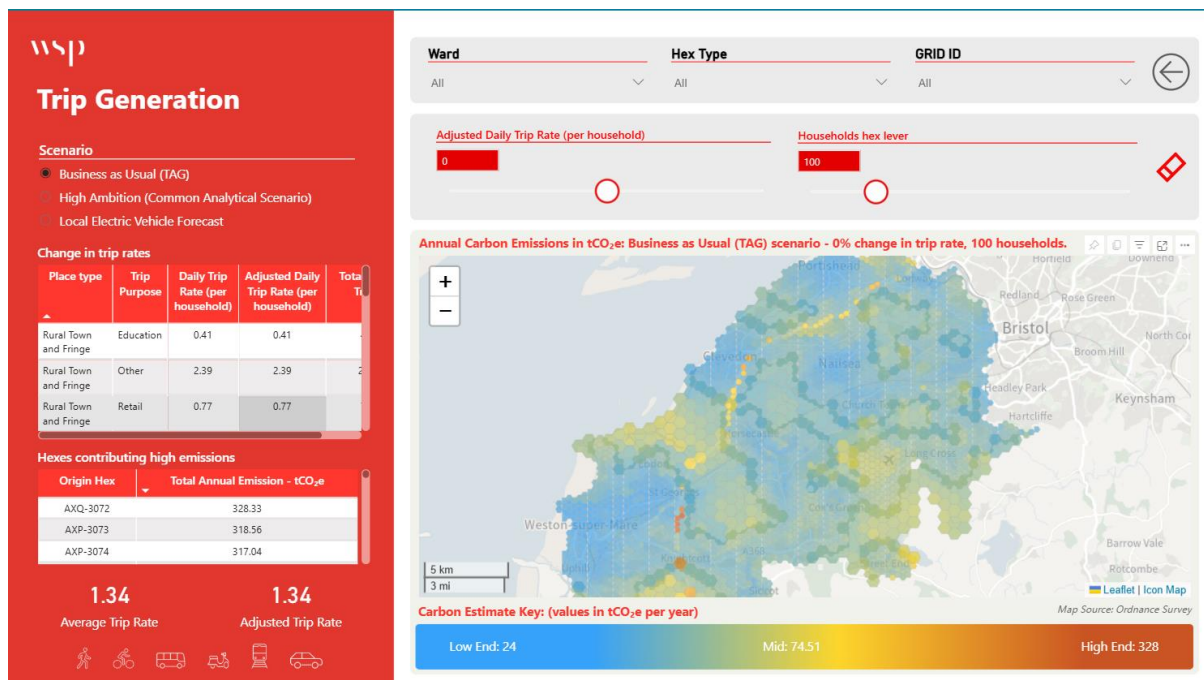
5.4 Spatial and Transport Planning tool

5.4.1 The second tool has been developed in partnership with WSP. This tool also brings together land use constraints with an accessibility and connectivity analysis, but at a finer geographical scale – 400m hex in urban areas, 800m in rural.

5.4.2 For each hexagon, planning and connectivity assessments are provided at three levels:

- 1) Databook: Displays planning constraint data drawn from WSP's Databook metrics, including Area, Demographics, Economic, Environmental, Planning, Social and Transport
- 2) Accessibility: Provides accessibility metrics based on access to the existing travel network (how a user can travel) and access to existing services (where a user can travel).
- 3) Trip generation: Allows users to test the impact of change in trip rate and households on hexagon-based emissions. This paves the way for reviewing the trip generation and carbon impact of different spatial planning policies and developing evidence led strategies for emissions reduction.





- 5.4.3 This tool supports both optioneering for housing land allocation (e.g. in Local Plan development) as well as rapid initial assessment of sites submitted through Development Management. Bath & North East Somerset Council are pioneers in the use of this tool and have been using it successfully to inform their Reg. 18 site selection and consultation.
- 5.4.4 Other partners within WGSTB, including West of England Combined Authority, North Somerset Council and Gloucestershire County Council, are having their data prepared for integration into the tool from early October. There is a small charge (£5k) for most LAs for this to be done, so the other Authorities are currently considering procurement.
- 5.4.5 In addition, external bodies including (at present) Cornwall Council, Homes England and Peninsula Transport have expressed an interest in also buying into the tool, having been impressed with its functionality. This will be a direct arrangement with WSP.
- 5.4.6 Due to the innovative nature of this work and the growing interest from external parties, we are considering submitting the Spatial and Transport Planning Tool for a national award at the end of this year, in partnership with WSP [Decarbonising Transport Awards | Home](#). We may also consider co-presenting on this work at future conferences.

6. Consultation, communication and engagement

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

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups

8. Legal considerations

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

9. Financial considerations

- 9.1 This work has been delivered within the allocated budget of £60k approved by the Board in March 2025.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 This paper provides a summary of recent work on Western Gateway's Regional Centre of Excellence. It is the subject of a specific report because this work is innovative, intensive and is attracting interest from beyond the WGSTB region, with the potential for submission for an award towards the end of this financial year.

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