

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper E

Date **17 September 2025**

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

Purpose of report: **To provide a progress 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.

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.

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 and shifting freight to rail and maritime.
- 2.2 Work to Date: The freight forums (three sub-groups and the main forum) has been maintained with a focus on fostering a broader range of engagement. Forum meetings have been coordinated and continue to take place, with the latest one held at the end of May and the next one set to hold on 23 September 2025. Work on Freight awareness to enhance understanding of industry needs and challenges and highlighting the key levers available to local authorities to influence positive change is now completed. The learning materials for this work is now available on the Regional Centre of Excellence website for use by the Local Authorities (LA).

- 2.3 The Rail Freight Terminal feasibility study at Avonmouth is covered under agenda Item C.

3. Rail Strategy

- 3.1 Updates on the Dorset Metro and West of England Line (Tisbury Loop) are provided under agenda Item A.
- 3.2 **Westbury Platform 0:** As part of the Business Plan for 2025/26 the Western Gateway is committed to commissioning work for reinstating Platform 0 at Westbury station. This is a project with regional and national benefits and will improve services north-south and east west including to Bristol, Bath, Cardiff, Salisbury, Southampton, Portsmouth, Weymouth, Dorchester, Exeter, Yeovil, Reading and London. It is included in the Western Gateway Strategic Investment Plan, agreed by the Board in March 2025, as a priority scheme for the region. By providing more capacity at Westbury it will strengthen the case for a new station at Devizes Gateway. The study will also include timetabling for the Melksham single line upgrade and additional calls at Pewsey station (at additional cost). Western Gateway has kicked off and finalised the procurement process, with 70% of the proposed project budget funded by Western Gateway and the remaining 30% to be provided by Wiltshire Council. Commissioning the study from Network Rail, costed at £100,000. The final Basic Services Agreement has been signed by both parties and work is underway with inception meeting planned early September. Delivery of this work is expected early next year. A report will be brought to the March 2026 Board meeting.

4. Electric Vehicle Charging

- 4.1 The establishment of a successful EV South West forum with Peninsula Transport, to support the 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 next quarterly EV forum is scheduled for 30 September 2025. There will be continuous engagement with National Highways, private sector Charge Point operators and Network Distributors to understand the opportunities and challenges within the EV industry. Also, engaging with Energy Saving Trust to oversee common accessibility standards for chargers across the region.
- 4.2 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 earlier this year which showed the useability of the tool as well as an opportunity for LAs to ask questions. A questionnaire has been distributed to all Local Authorities to gather feedback on the tool and all workstreams that will inform the ongoing EV priority work. This will be collated and analysed following responses received from Local Authorities. A further update on the progress of the EV work package will be given at the next Board Meeting.

5. Coach Strategy

- 5.1 The feasibility study of all three priority routes identified in the Strategy is complete and available to view on the website. The potential to develop a business case for route two (Cheltenham-Bristol Airport route) is being explored with stakeholder, which will be taken forward by the additional internal resource.
- 5.2 The studies indicated that the two routes coming up from the south coast to Bristol Airport and Gloucestershire are probably not suitable for end-to-end coach services. We hope to investigate alternative options integrating bus, rail and coach through a multi modal corridor study, dependent on internal resources.
- 5.3 The Southwest Coach Forum is ongoing, with engagement including local authorities, coach operators, Bristol Airport, Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) and National Highways. The next forum is scheduled for 14th October 2025, and, for the present, the STB has decided to continue the organisation of these forums in house, rather than rely on consultant support. This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- 5.4 The Coach Forum continues to generate effective engagement, with the last one in March resulting in an audit of coach parking issues and two operators working with Bristol Airport to test the layout of their new planned interchange and coach park, using a variety of vehicles. Cllr Hannah Young, Allan Creedy and Hannah Fountain attended the launch of the new passenger interchange at Bristol Airport in July.
- 5.5 AECOM conducted site visits to coach parking locations in Spring 2025, and have produced a report identifying challenges and improvements at individual sites. [The report](#) has been published on the Western Gateway website and potential ways to address some of the issues identified will be discussed at the next Forum in October.

6. Cycling

- 6.1 The Western Gateway Cycling Strategy was approved by the Board on 25 March 2025 (pending minor updates, which have now been completed). The strategy can be seen on our website at [Cycling | Western Gateway STB](#). At the same meeting, the Board approved the Business Plan for the 2025/26 financial year, which included £20,000 allocated to progress the cycling strategy and contribute to/part fund the development of a business case for priority route(s)
- 6.2 To provide recommendations on where best to direct that investment, Western Gateway (WG) commissioned Atkins to undertake a review of 12 high priority routes from the approved network (the ten highest scoring routes, plus two additional routes to provide geographical coverage) and provide recommendations on potential next steps. The resulting [report](#) was circulated to all constituent Local Authorities for feedback in July and published in August. Three priority route sections have been identified for further development:

- 1) Wareham to Poole to Bournemouth to Christchurch
- 2) Felton, Barrow Lane to Bedminster
- 3) Clevedon to Portishead

Two sections have been designated as delivery priorities:

- 1) Kemble to Cirencester
- 2) Cam & Dursley to Stonehouse and Stroud

- 6.3 Opportunities to progress these priority sections will be reviewed and discussed with Local Authority partners in the next quarter.

7. Buses

- 7.1 As part of the Regional Centre of Excellence programme for 2025/26 the Western Gateway is committed to undertaking work on buses and in particular cross boundary services. With the arrival of two new Transport Officers in September 2025 this work is now starting. One of their first tasks will be to pick up on the recently published Transport Select Committee report on the future of local bus services. They will look at ways to help our local authorities address the challenges identified in the report, focusing on bus devolution, cross-boundary infrastructure and cross-subsidy planning. We will also use our Regional Centre of Excellence to support the call to expand the national Bus Centre of Excellence.

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 Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport carried out a call for rural mobility pilots throughout Autumn 2024, with 4 winning organisations. Three from Western Gateway area and one from Peninsula. Work has commenced with all the pilots which are fully operational:
- 8.3 Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership – Enhancing Access to Rural Spaces. Research phase of the project is completed on reviewing and analysing literature on the topic of demand responsive transport (DRT). Series of focused group meetings ongoing which is designed to gather a range of insights on DRT. Expecting the marketing materials in November 2025 and the final report to summarise the outputs of focus groups due in February 2026.
- 8.4 Bridport Town Council – West Bay Weekend Shuttle Bus. A minibus service runs every hour on weekend afternoons and evenings, offering an easy, affordable and sustainable way to travel between the town centre and the coast. The service launched on 26th July 2025, carrying 1497 passenger trips

in the first 6 weekends of operation, with positive feedback from all. Final report due Spring 2026.

- 8.5 Forest of Dean District Council (FoDDC) – Low-Carbon Shared Mobility Club. The electric Hiyacar has been delivered and installed this summer. Progress continues to be made on the e-bike provider. E Bikes are available to book from FoD Location and some now in use by FoDDC wider resident / employer promotion in FoD.
- 8.6 Application for the next call for pilot is now live, with deadline for applications 5th October 2025. This will be assessed following the same methodology as the current pilots. An update will be brought to the next partnership board meeting.
- 8.7 A field trip to view the pilots in Gloucestershire is being planned for 9/10 October 2025.

9. Regional Centre of Excellence

- 9.1 A separate report (paper D) is provided for the RCoE workstreams.

10. Future Funding, Business Plan for 2026/27 and recruitment

- 10.1 There is still no clear timeline on DfT confirming the amount of funding for 2026/27. The indications are this will be less than in 2025/26. The Western Gateway remains fully funded for 2025/26 and will continue to deliver its work programme as set out in the Business Plan agreed at the 25 March 2025 Board.
- 10.2 Despite the uncertainty it is important to start work on the Western Gateway Business Plan for 2026/27. It is proposed that in line with the emerging Integrated National Transport Strategy the Business Plan is focused around the three key themes of People, Place and Partnerships. The existing work programme with its focus on coach, rail, rural mobility pilots, EV and cycling already fits well with this whilst the Regional Centre of Excellence work on land use planning and other tools emphasises the place and partnerships aspects. As part of the Business Plan preparation we will undertake a capacity and capability survey with the constituent authorities.
- 10.3 The changing devolution landscape will mean the Western Gateway will need to evolve finding new ways to work collaboratively on our shared regional issues. We have built up good cross boundary relations between the local authorities, at both Member and officer levels, and we want to maintain and build on this. The Business Plan will reflect this and subject to confirmation of funding will be reported to the Board for approval at the December 2025 meeting.
- 10.4 Two new Transport Officers Adi Roser and Tim Woodhead have started with the Western Gateway in September 2025. They will be working across the full programme and picking up new areas such as bus. The Transport Research and Data Officer post attracted a large number of applicants and following interviews we are pleased to announce the post has been filled. The new officer

will hopefully start at the beginning of October 2025. All posts are for 12 months and are funded from the 2025/26 budget.

11. Consultation, communication and engagement

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

12. Equalities Implications

- 12.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups.

13. Legal considerations

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

14. Financial considerations

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

15. Conclusion

- 15.1 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 taken place so far this financial year. Also, the future funding, resourcing and business planning 2026/27 of the Western Gateway. The Board is recommended to note these.

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