

Western Gateway Partnership Board Meeting

Agenda

Wednesday 17th Sept 2025, 14:00 -16:00

Location: Salisbury Room, County Hall, Trowbridge

	Item	Lead	Time
1	Welcome and apologies	Cllr Chris Willmore	14:00
2	Governance - Election of Chair and Vice Chair	Allan Creedy	14:05
3	Minutes and actions from the previous meeting (See Appendix 1 below)	Chair	14:15
4	Public Participation (Paper circulated separately to Board members) Questions or Representations from members of the public in line with the Board's Public Participation Scheme.	Chair	14:20
MATTERS FOR DECISION			
5	Rail Strategy - Approval of Dorset Metro and West of England Line Strategic Outline Business Cases (SOBCs) and Next Steps - <u>Paper A</u>	James White	14:30
6	Major Road Network (MRN) Report - Board's position regarding the schemes - <u>Paper B</u>	James White	14:40
7	Rail Freight Feasibility Study at Avonmouth - <u>Paper C</u>	Morag Robertson - Polaris Consultancy	14:50
MATTERS FOR INFORMATION			
8	Regional Centre of Excellence - <u>Paper D</u>	Hannah Fountain	15:00
9	Technical Programme Update - <u>Paper E</u>	James White	15:05
10	Finance update - <u>Paper F</u>	Mena Abidakun	15:10
11	Updates from Associate Members - DfT - Verbal update (inc update on RIS3 and INTS key principles) - Network Rail - Verbal update - National Highways - verbal update	Ben Kempner Matt Haywood/Bogdan Lup Heather Cowling	15:15
12	AOB Item for future agenda	Chair All	15:55

Date of next meeting: TBC

Time and Location: County Hall, Trowbridge (subject to room availability)

Appendix One - DRAFT Minutes and Actions from last Board Meeting

Tuesday 25th June 2025, 14:30-16:30

Location: Trowbridge County Hall, Bythesea Road, Wiltshire BA14 4YT and virtual

Attendees:	
Name	Organisation
Cllr Andy Hadley	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) (AH)
Cllr Chris Willmore	South Gloucestershire Council (CW)
Cllr Ed Plowden	Bristol City Council (EP)
Cllr Hannah Young	North Somerset Council (HY)
Cllr Martin Smith	Wiltshire County Council (MS)
Cllr Roger Whyborn	Gloucestershire County Council (RW)
Cllr Sarah Warren	Bath and North East Somerset Council (SW)
Cllr Tim Rippington	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (TR) (Deputising for mayor)
Cllr Jon Andrews	Dorset Council (JA)
Andy Whitehead	South Gloucestershire Council (AW)
David Bullock	Wiltshire Council (DB)
Jack Wiltshire	Dorset Council (JW)
Lindsay Margerison	Bath and North East Somerset Council (LM)
Louise McBride	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (LMcB)
Orlagh Phipps	Gloucestershire County Council (OP)
Richard Pincroft	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) (RP)
Matt Haywood	Network Rail (MH)
Ben Kempner	Department for Transport (BK)
Heather Cowling	National Highways (HC)
Hannah Shrimpton	Peninsula Transport STB (HS)
James White	Western Gateway STB (JWh)
Allan Creedy	Western Gateway STB (AC)
Hattie James	Western Gateway STB (HJ)
Mena Abidakun	Western Gateway STB (MA)
Hannah Fountain	Western Gateway STB (HF)
Apologies were received from:	
Colin Chick	Gloucestershire County Council (CC)
Jessica Holroyd	Western Gateway STB (JH)

Actions	Allocated to	Target Date:
Amend the minutes of the previous meeting to accurately reflect MCA's attendance	JH	June 2025
Check dates of internal WECA committee and ensure rural mobility programme aligns	HJ	July 2025

Item No	Notes / Actions
1.	Welcome, apologies and introductions. Cllr Willmore will be Chairing this meeting. New members and as well returning members welcomed. Introductions were made. The outgoing Chair Cllr Manda Rigby is standing down. Cllr Willmore read out the short statement, which explained that Cllr Rigby was stepping down as Chair due to a change in portfolio, and stressed the importance of having the region in mind. Given the turnover in membership, Cllr Willmore will continue as Vice Chair (stepping up to Chair) for this meeting and then an election can be initiated in September.
2.	Actions and Minutes of Previous Meeting There is one correction regarding the attendance of MCA at the last meeting. They did not attend. ACTION: Amend minutes from last meeting to reflect MCA's attendance. It was flagged that in the actions it said feedback from DfT should be feedback 'to' DfT. It was confirmed it should remain as feedback from them, which has not yet been received.
3.	Public Questions There have been questions from the public and written responses to the questions. The responses were emailed out and are also on the website. The Board will circle back to the item after David Redgewell has had the opportunity to read and absorb the answer. There was nothing else on the item.
4.	Paper A – Strategic Cycleway Network The overall network was approved by the Board in the previous meeting in March. The proposal under discussion today is regarding commencing work on the delivery of the network. This focuses on 12 routes – 10 highest priority routes in the Strategy + 2 to ensure geographical coverage. We have worked with the LAs to understand what has been delivered/in progress/not started on these routes and look at how Western Gateway STB (WG) may best utilise the £20k funding allocated to support delivery. The paper

	recommends five priority route section; two are close to delivery (requiring capital funding) and three need more development work (revenue funding). There is concern about the low funding and the precedent it might set in terms of where is invested in. It is hoped that we can work with colleagues in Network Rail and Highways England. Cllr Andy Hadley is keen to know the next steps to get value out of our partnerships. Western Gateway STB will incorporate this into the next stages. All members are in favour of the recommendations and the paper is approved as next steps.
5.	Paper B – Rural mobility There are two parts to the paper. The first part is an update to the pilots that are up and running now. There are three pilots within WG and one in Peninsula Transport, as it is a joint project in the Southwest area. WG is funding: - Focus groups and marketing around The Robin DRT service in Gloucestershire - Forest of Dean mobility hub and electric car vehicles - Frequent bus service in the evenings and weekends from Bridport to West Bay The second part of the paper regards the launch of a new Call for Pilots for the current year, utilising £60k allocated in the Business Plan for 2025/26. WG is looking for a member to help facilitate signing off more pilots and agreeing on the winning applications. Volunteers for lead members are Cllr Sarah Warren and Cllr Andy Hadley. These Cllrs have been appointed as joint lead members. Clarification was asked about timeframes. Following some revisions to the supporting information, the Call for pilots will be going out in late July, closing in mid-late September. Following assessment of applications, the selected winners will go through MCA's internal grant assurance process, with final sign off by December. LMcB raised that there is no committee meeting in December, so taking this offline to establish next steps would be prudent. Action: Check MCA's committee dates and ensure programme is aligned.
6.	Paper C – Programme Update WG went through highlights. Rail is close to getting Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for Dorset Metro proposal and for the West of England Line work. A full report will be brought to the September Board meeting. Westbury platform work in Business Plan for 2025/26 is underway. Coach strategy – more work will be done looking at coach routes one and three. Coach parking study completed and will be published imminently. Buses –part of the Business Plan for 2025/26. Following recruitment, the additional Transport Officer will be leading on the bus work.

	RCoE (Regional Centre of Excellence) – almost at point of being able to roll out series of tools for Local Authorities. WG have set up a RCoE private website, with resources and a chat function. Homes England is leading on an innovative study looking at the M5 corridor and collaborating with WG on this. A letter to the Secretary of State on the A303 and the cancellation of the Stonehenge tunnel was sent on request of the Board. There has been a positive response from the Minister of Roads and has asked their officials to reach out to us. The response is attached as an Appendix. There has been no contact yet. Funding Update - There has been no confirmation of funding for next year (2026/27). Fully funded for this Financial Year and thanks was given to Local Authorities for their ongoing financial contributions. However, future funding remains uncertain, raising concerns about operational sustainability. A couple of markers for options to be considered include: If no funding confirmed for next year, the STB would have to wind down, the team can carry on for at least 6 months, providing a short-term buffer, but it will be a decision for the Board to decide management/disposal of any remaining assets. Option two is the possibility of having another one-year interim settlement. The third option is where we might receive a two or near three year funding settlement which would enable WG to plan out future programme and look at the structure of staff. Note that these options are indicative only. No immediate decisions are being requested from the Board. Clarity on funding is expected by September, which will support informed decision-making. The Board will be invited to provide feedback, guidance, or preferences on the presented funding options. Comments/questions following update: Cllr Andy Hadley commented on the Coach work as it was felt that the coach journey has similarities to the train experience in terms of the challenge facing passengers, particularly the total wait times for journeys and interested in exploring how the issues could be addressed, particularly in simplifying travel and improving user experience. Cllr Tim Rippington highlighted the pressure on the existing team and asks if the vacancies will be filled now, regardless of the outcome of the DfT funding decision. The answer is yes, as it was budgeted for at the beginning of the year. It was asked why Filton Bank is being prioritised over the Bath to Bristol link. MH explained that, while both are important, Filton Bank has been prioritised to achieve electrification before the diesel fleet on that line reaches end of life and needs to be replaced. Electrification of the line prior to this date would enable replacement with electric/battery electric rolling stock. Additionally Filton Bank has local services and long distance services. It was further asked if Filton Bank would enable Bristol to Cardiff to be run with electric trains. MH confirmed this is the case. They may not need a fully electrified route with use of battery electric trains, but a minimum coverage needs to be achieved. Cllr Martin Smith said he is pleased to see the Westbury platform is getting attention and progress. He noted that national funding has now been awarded to the A350 and asked if the SIP would be updated in response. WG said that the STP which preceded the SIP was
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	before the change in national government and based on the previous government's aims, therefore it was always known that both the STP and the SIP would need to be reviewed in the next 12-18 months. WG are awaiting the release of the Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS) and associated guidance before proceeding so timeframes are currently speculative. INTS currently expected at the end of the year. It was asked what the process would be for the STP and SIP for Local Authorities that have changed hands. WG confirmed a lot of things have moved on and the task will be to identify what has changed, evidence needed and the gaps in the evidence based (e.g. understanding of resilience). As regards to the political landscape, as with the current version of plans, political priorities will come to the fore when the STP is reviewed and we set the vision and targets for the new plan. Cllr Hannah Young would be happy to have an offline conversation with new members about how that process worked. She asked about the initiation of the piece of work lead by Homes England on the M5 corridor. She asked if it was a result of previous work done around the M5, notably by South Gloucestershire, or whether Homes England had approached WGSTB separately? WG confirmed it is a mixture of both.
7.	Paper D – Finance Paper The Finance Report provided an overview of the financial position of WG. The report summarizes the end-of-year position for the 2024/25 financial year, which was finalized and signed off by the Combined Authority Finance Director. Total funding for the last financial year was £996k, including a notable increase in DfT grant funding compared to the previous year. Final expenditure for the year was approximately £978k, leaving a carry-forward balance of about £17k. Additionally, £130k was ring-fenced for projects not completed towards the end of the financial year ending in March, to support work that carried over into the current year. By the end of May, just over £200k had been spent, primarily on staffing and technical programs that were carried over from last year. An additional £640k has already been committed for work currently in the pipeline, with around £141k retained in the contingency fund. The recommendation is to note the end-of-year position for 2024/25 and the current financial standing. Everyone agreed to note this. WG thanked the Local Authorities for their contributions so far, with 6 confirmed payment and three in the pipeline.
	Public Participation David Redgewell – Southwest Transport Network Mr Redgewell verbally acknowledged that the region is significantly behind other STBs on bus strategy, lacking coordination, investment, and integration. While other areas are pushing ahead under the existing “Bus Back Better” policy and despite national momentum, this region continues to fall short on integrated bus and coach planning.

	Noted good progress on coaches, but requested WG do more to support buses, particularly cross-boundary. Bus and coach services are fragmented, with minimal operator engagement and poor access. Several corridors, including those in Somerset and Bournemouth, were mentioned as examples where social media visibility and some operational improvements exist. However, while there is activity in technical work and planning, this remains fragmented without strong regional leadership or integration. Officers and consultants are doing their part, particularly around integrating bus policy, but more structured support is needed. There's concern that rail dominates local priorities, side lining buses, coaches, and ferries. There is an urgent need for regional coordination, and it was suggested that officer time from local councils or combined authorities could be pooled to create a dedicated team. Without enthusiastic leadership and resource allocation, further progress will remain slow. There is also a need for greater commitment to accessibility, with all transport corridor plans including equality and disability assessments. Accessibility at interchanges like coach and bus stations remains inadequate, and efforts to engage commercial operators have been challenging. It was also requested that efforts be made to encourage publication of a government report identifying which stations are fully accessible. A call was made for clearer commitments around bus and coach station access, citing long delays in improvement projects in places such as Dorchester and Cheltenham Spa. It was proposed that a formal letter be written to the mayor of the North East Combined Authority and the local council leader to advocate for improved access and reopening of coach and rail facilities in Newcastle, particularly to support disabled passengers and general users of the FlixBus network. Cllr Chris Willmore acknowledged that historically, WG had not focused on buses. Although efforts are now being made to widen its scope and move toward a more integrated regional transport approach, progress will take time to fully meet expectations. Concerns regarding the current quality of Equality Impact Statements, which are often limited to a single sentence claiming no significant impact was highlighted. WG officers should look to ensure more meaningful assessment and reporting in future documents. On the topic of railway accessibility, Cllr Chris Willmore noted that disabled access issues should be addressed in upcoming discussions. There was a request to review the current work plan to ensure equalities and accessibility are properly embedded and to consider how these elements can be strengthened in future work. The issue of Newcastle bus access was noted and will be followed up separately. Mr Redgewell requested to push for a formal coach forum through the Department for Transport via STBs, to examine the role of major national operators such as National Express, FlixBus, and regional bus services. The aim is to ensure a consistent and strategic national approach to coach services, beyond just the West Country focus. The proposal aligns with the broader goal of looking at a national strategy. Cllr Chris Willmore noted this and will be taken away for discussion.
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	John Cosh was also in attendance as a public participant.
	Department for Transport Update DfT confirmed there is no more information about future funding for STBs at this stage. The key message is that the process has now entered a business planning phase, during which government will make decisions on individual projects, including STB-related funding. No specific funding allocations have been made yet, but announcements are expected in due course. The funding will cover a four-year period and includes support for projects such as East-West Rail and other infrastructure schemes highlighted in the Chancellor's recent review. Projects not directly referenced in the spending review may still receive funding announcements later. Major Road Network (MRN) & Infrastructure: Ongoing MRN funding for congestion relief and growth. A new £1bn Regional Structures Fund will support local infrastructure maintenance. Transforming City Regions (TCR) transport settlements (TCRs): £6bn to be allocated to elected mayors through to 2031/32, consolidating various transport funds to boost local decision-making. Local Transport: £2.3m for reviews outside TCR areas and £100m for building local delivery capacity. Allocation details coming soon. Bus Services: £900m/year revenue funding continues. Support for franchising, zero-emission buses, and infrastructure. £2 fare cap extended to March 2027 (covers 5,000 routes). Grants maintained at current levels. Active Travel: £616m allocated for walking and cycling infrastructure. Scheme details pending. EV Charging: Ongoing investment in EV and HGV charging infrastructure on strategic roads. Further details forthcoming. Road Maintenance: £24m between 2026–2030 (20% funding increase) for improved road conditions. Maritime Decarbonisation (UK SHORE): Funding extended to 2030 for green shipbuilding and clean maritime tech. Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS) will be published by end of 2025. The team has processed 6,300 responses for call for ideas and the feedback gathered from regional roadshows. Greatest amount of feedback was around improving maintenance and congestion, better modal experience, better transport information and public involvement prior to decision making. Roadshows – user focus and accessibility, affordability, reliability, embedding transport into local growth plans, funding reform and devolved powers and making space for car free alternatives. The message is around transport for everyone.

	Cllr Chris Willmore asked for clearer timelines for funding to help STBs plan effectively and make informed decisions. DfT acknowledged the concern however, are unable to answer any questions relating to timescales. It was raised that multi-year settlements for buses are more beneficial than short term ones. Dorset flagged that the way they receive funding is not beneficial for them and the issues around rurality. DfT confirmed they do have a meeting scheduled to discuss this further with Dorset. It was flagged about the £3 bus cap and competition with train services. DfT confirmed that the INTS should address these challenges and integrating different modes. Once this has been released they would welcome a session with STBs. It was asked about the money put aside for roads and potholes, but there is infrastructure coming towards their end of life in the region – is there money set aside for infrastructure renewal? DfT said there is about £500m for regional restructures fund (this is still to be confirmed).
	National Highways and Network Rail Update Cllr Ed Plowden raised a concern about capital works and National Highway’s policy of focusing repair work on returning an asset to the state as it was in, regardless of the suitability for current and or future conditions. He gave the example of the refurbishment of the M32 flyover at Eastville and the focus on restoring it to the current functionality rather than seeking to revise and improve it to meet Bristol’s current plans and aspirations. WECA is modelling an approach to change M32 and repurpose what it will do. National Highways is refusing to do anything but restore the current structure. EP and others feel there is an opportunity to work together to develop a future plan that could be part of traffic management solution. DfT agree that collaboration is key. National Highways confirmed they would come back with an update. Network Rail update Matt Haywood updated on the following: - Midlands Rail Hub was announced in spending review – improves services into M5 corridor - South Wales station - Latest review of Treasury Green Book - Infrastructure strategy will be refreshed - Strong growth in last 12 months; commuting has been the dominant factor. We are at 99% of national journeys compared to pre-covid. Monday is still busier than a Saturday. - Dorset and Tisbury cases have encouraging progress - Soon to collaborate with Western Gateway STB on the Westbury platform - Supporting the M5 corridor work and are scoping up a study - Looking at Poole area strategic study which will be spatial

	- Looking at Bath – Bristol corridor. Understanding impact of housing targets and the future demand and how to support this (facilities, accessibility etc) - Soon to share a rail freight study - Accessibility road map will be published this year - Maintain a list of priority stations for accessibility It was raised that there are issues with overcrowding and whether there is an ambition to increase capacity on the trains. Network Rail confirmed there have been changes made – in May more seats into Bristol and extra services, but it is recognised there is crowding across the network. Looking to bring in new stock but this will take time and there are constraints, costs etc. National Highways update Heather Cowling updated on the following: - Update on spending review: Little detail on SRN - £24 billion to maintain and improve SRN and local reviews between 26/27 to 29/30. Improve long term condition of road network. Details to be confirmed as part of RIS3 process, published later in financial year. - 7.5 tonne weight limit on M48 bridge: Police presence in and around, targeted activity to enforce new restrictions. ANPR cameras have been put in place. Dedicated team on medium term solution, creating a monthly newsletter to keep everyone informed. - A417: scheme is progressing well and will be open for traffic in Spring 2027. Gloucester way crossing. Phase 2 due to commence next year. Further work is to do landscaping work. They are extending another invite to view the scheme. - A303 Ilchester scheme: road open to traffic in October 2024. Working on a map to show local bridleway connections. - A432: on schedule to begin beam lift in late October 2025. Require final weekend closure of M4. On track for completion of Spring 2026.
	AOB A member of the public put a question in the chat. They are in transit so they are happy for the response to be provided in writing. The question was: 'Can we do something about trains to Bristol Weston to Minehead to relieve the bus 28 overcrowding'? Board members were encouraged to indicate to Western Gateway if there are items of interest for future agenda items. Thanks were extended to Cllr Rigby for her work. Thanks were also extended to former board members who previously served on the board.

Mr Redgewell highlighted the passing of Andrew Wickham, Managing Director of Go South Coast who made significant contributions to bus services across the region, particularly in Dorset. He was recognised as a dedicated advocate and champion of public transport, especially bus services, and his efforts had a meaningful impact on service provision across the South. Cllr Chris Willmore noted this.

Cllr Chris Willmore asked if attendees were comfortable continuing to use the current venue. There was general agreement from the group.

MA extended thanks to David and Noreen from Wiltshire Council for their efforts in coordinating the logistics particularly venue coordination, and overall support.