

## Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September, 14:30-16:30

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

Attendees	
Name	Organisation
Cllr Chris Willmore	South Gloucestershire Council (CW)
Cllr Ed Plowden	Bristol City Council (EP)
Cllr Hannah Young	North Somerset Council (HY)
Cllr Jon Andrews	Dorset Council (JA)
Cllr Kevin Guy	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (KG) (Deputising for mayor)
Cllr Martin Smith	Wiltshire County Council (MS)
Cllr Roger Whyborn	Gloucestershire County Council (RW)
Cllr Sarah Warren	Bath and North East Somerset Council (SW)
Alexis Edwards	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) (AE)
Andy Whitehead	South Gloucestershire Council (AW)
Bill Davies	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (BD)
David Bullock	Wiltshire Council (DB)
Kelly Flynn	Dorset Council (KF)
Lindsay Margerison	Bath and North East Somerset Council (LM)
Orlagh Phipps	Gloucestershire County Council (OP)
Owen Clark	Dorset Council (OC)
Rob Smith	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (RS)
Steve Thorne	North Somerset Council (ST)
Ben Kempner	Department for Transport (BK)
Zoe Arnold	National Highways (ZA)
Matt Haywood	Network Rail (MH)
Jaime Rockhill	Network Rail (JR)
Ewan Wilson	Peninsula Transport STB (EW)
Hannah Shrimpton	Peninsula Transport STB (HS)
Lauren Hutton	Peninsula Transport STB (LH)
Christina Biggs	Public participant (CB)
David Redgewell	Public participant (DR)
Rosa Kell	Public participant (RK)
Christina Biggs	Public participant (CB)
Morag Robertson	Polaris Consultancy (MR)
Ian Brooker	Polaris Consultancy (IB)
Iain Taylor	Polaris Consultancy (IT)
Adi Roser	Western Gateway STB (AR)
Allan Creedy	Western Gateway STB (AC)
Hannah Fountain	Western Gateway STB (HF)
James White	Western Gateway STB (JWh)
Jessica Holroyd	Western Gateway STB (JH)

Mena Abidakun	Western Gateway STB (MA)
Tim Woodhead	Western Gateway STB (TW)
<b>Apologies</b>	
Cllr Andy Hadley	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) (AH)
Colin Chick	Gloucestershire County Council (CC)
Heather Cowling	National Highways (HC)
Louise McBride	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (LMcB)
Jacob Pryor	Bristol City Council (JP)

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Allocated to</b>
Write to the Rail Minister regarding service capacity and infrastructure investment in the South West.	WG
Raise bus and coach issues at the upcoming Coach Forum, including rural bus funding and coach accessibility testing.	WG
Consider sending a letter to DfT Ministers regarding rural bus funding structures and flexibility (including Bus Service Improvement Plan allocations).	WG
Coordinate with Peninsula Transport and DfT to explore options for integrated bus, train, and coach ticketing across the South West.	Cllr HY, BD and Cllr KG, JW, Cllr JA & Cllr MS
Send the proposed letter to the Secretary of State expressing continued support for all three schemes (MRN) that are in the Western Gateway area.	JW
Make the composite map more reflective in the final work that is being delivered of the Spatial Planning Tool	HF
Board members to get in touch if they wish to attend the main Freight Forum.	Members
Circulate the DfT guidance letter to members on STB future funding and structures.	WG
Share detailed information on Westerleigh Junction feasibility with Cllr SW and explore partner roles in strengthening the case.	MH
Engagement with DfT, National Highways, Network Rail, and Peninsula Transport to develop options paper for future governance and collaboration, including funding approaches and strategic priorities.	WG

Arrange an informal workshop for late October/early November to review draft proposals.	WG
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Ref.	Notes / Actions
1.	<p><b>Welcome, apologies and introductions</b></p> <p>Cllr CW opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees, including new members of the Western Gateway STB team and colleagues from WECA. She thanked everyone for attending and asked new participants to introduce themselves the first time they spoke.</p>
	<p><b>Election of new Chair</b></p> <p>AC explained the need to elect a new Chair and Vice Chair due to constitutional requirements and changes in the previous Chair's role. He invited nominations for a Chair.</p> <p>Cllr HY nominated Cllr CW to continue as Chair.</p> <p>Cllr JA seconded the nomination.</p> <p>The nomination was unanimously supported.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> Cllr CW was confirmed as Chair of the Western Gateway STB.</p> <p>AC then invited nominations for Vice Chair.</p> <p>Cllr HY nominated Cllr EP.</p> <p>Cllr MS seconded the nomination.</p> <p>The nomination was unanimously supported.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> Cllr EP was confirmed as Vice Chair of the Western Gateway STB.</p> <p>AC handed the agenda back to Cllr CW to continue with the rest of the meeting.</p>
2.	<p><b>Actions and Minutes of Previous Meeting</b></p> <p>JW noted minor corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting relating to points raised by National Highways. CW confirmed these had been addressed and asked if there were any further matters arising - none were raised.</p> <p>The minutes were agreed.</p>
3.	<p><b>Public Questions</b></p> <p>Mr David Redgewell (DR) raised several points concerning transport investment in the South West:</p> <p>A clear plan and funding are needed for rural bus services, which are currently underfunded despite the Bus Services Bill progressing. There are ongoing service gaps, and concerns over inadequate rural funding.</p>

DR highlighted insufficient rail investment, specifically the Dawlish Sea Wall and Parsons Tunnel schemes, which are vital for economic and defence connectivity between Plymouth and Bristol. He expressed concern about idle cross-country trains in depots while overcrowding persists during peak periods, particularly on services to Bournemouth and the South West.

DR emphasised the importance of investment in the South West rail corridor and called for the Department for Transport (DfT) to prioritise these issues. He also raised concerns about coach accessibility and requested testing of new coaches to ensure full wheelchair access. Finally, he requested that Newcastle Coach Station be repaired.

Cllr CW proposed that:

- A letter be sent to the Rail Minister regarding rail service issues raised.
- Bus and coach issues be raised at the upcoming Coach Forum.
- Consideration be given to writing to the relevant DfT Ministers about rural bus service funding.

Cllr HY supported the proposal and added that Access for All remains a critical issue. She noted examples in her area (North Somerset) where lack of accessible infrastructure has caused significant journey challenges. A comprehensive list of priority stations for accessibility improvements should be compiled.

CW noted the recently launched mobility agenda by Sustrans, Transport for All, and the Motability Foundation and offered to circulate details.

Cllr JA highlighted issues with Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding allocation in Dorset, where two-thirds of funding was capital and one-third revenue. This structure does not support ongoing bus service subsidies in rural areas. Dorset had requested flexibility from DfT to reallocate funds but were refused. He asked that this issue be included in the letter on rural bus services.

**ACTION: Write to the Rail Minister regarding service capacity and infrastructure investment in the South West.**

**Raise bus and coach issues at the upcoming Coach Forum, including rural bus funding and coach accessibility testing.**

**Consider sending a letter to DfT Ministers regarding rural bus funding structures and flexibility (including BSIP allocations).**

Christina Biggs (CB) is representing the Bristol Railway Campaign and provided updates on several key areas:

Portishead Line – Expressed optimism about progress and mentioned plans for an event taking place.

Westerleigh Junction – Stressed the importance of the scheme and suggested liaising with Midlands partners for additional support. Recommended organising a site visit to Westerleigh Junction with relevant officers to progress discussions.

Tram-Trains – Advocated for exploring tram-train solutions as part of Bristol's transport strategy and potentially in other areas where heavy rail may not be cost-effective.

Rail–Bus Interchange – Emphasised the importance of ensuring that bus services connect with local and suburban railway stations, with timetables synchronised to improve rural connectivity and reduce reliance on cars.

Lawrence Hill Station Accessibility – Reported that one lift is planned, but discussions are ongoing to secure funding for a second lift to improve station access. Suggested liaising with WECA on wider accessibility priorities, such as Nailsea & Backwell station.

Climate Resilience – Noted that she had submitted comments to the Strategic Transport Plan consultation highlighting the need to integrate climate resilience planning, drawing on international best practice such as Sweden’s total defence approach.

DR spoke on behalf of Rosa Kell (RK). He raised the issue of cross-border bus services, stressing the importance of maintaining strong links between Peninsula, Somerset, Wiltshire, and the Bristol–Bath area. He referred to previous work on a Peninsula travel card covering buses, trains, and coaches, and requested coordination between Western Gateway, Peninsula, and the Department for Transport to ensure integrated ticketing across the South West.

Cllr CW agreed that:

**ACTION:** Cllr HY (North Somerset), with officers, BD and Cllr KG (WECA), and JW (Western Gateway), Cllr JA (Dorset) and Cllr MS (Wiltshire) would lead on taking integrated ticketing forward and coordinating next steps.

4. **Paper A – Dorset Metro and West of England Line**

**Dorset Metro:**

JW provided an update on the long-standing proposal to introduce an additional train per hour along the south coast between Wareham and Brockenhurst, originally identified through the Dorset Connectivity Study. The study has been jointly funded by Western Gateway (WG) and Dorset Council, with Network Rail developing a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) exploring six options, with costs ranging from £37 million to £66 million. Although the proposal would deliver new passengers and improved connectivity, the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) is currently low due to high operational costs. WG recognises the scheme’s potential benefits but emphasised the need to consider it within the wider strategic and multi-modal context. It is proposed that further work will be undertaken in-house by WG and local authority officers.

JW sought the Board’s approval for the allocation of up to £50,000 to procure technical support, noting that this funding can be accommodated within existing budgets.

**Tisbury Loop – West of England Line:**

The proposal stems from a previous strategy recommending half-hourly services between Salisbury and Yeovil, addressing existing performance and reliability issues on this largely single-track route. The current work is examining options to enable these service improvements, with the preferred option focusing on an extended loop at Tisbury station to enhance performance and reliability.

Although the initial BCR was low, this was due to the high-level nature of the business case, which did not fully reflect the performance benefits. Network Rail will undertake further work to better capture these benefits.

	<p>The scheme could cost £31 million if delivered alongside works at Salisbury, or up to £80 million as a standalone scheme. The recommendation for the West of England Line is to support Network Rail's continued development of the performance benefits, with Local Authorities and the STB stepping back from further work at this stage. Network Rail considers there is a strong case for the Tisbury loop. No additional STB commissioned work is currently planned.</p> <p>Cllr JA stressed the urgent need to progress the Dorset Metro and West of England Line schemes, highlighting severe overcrowding and the need for action rather than further discussion.</p> <p>Cllr CW (on behalf of Cllr Andy Hadley, BCP) echoed support and raised concerns about higher fares on South Coast routes, particularly Brockenhurst–Wareham, which may discourage rail use.</p> <p>Cllr MS emphasised the importance of service reliability and noted support for the proposed next steps following clarification on BCR methodology.</p> <p>The Board unanimously supports the next steps for both schemes, noting strong enthusiasm for rail improvements.</p>
5.	<p><b>Paper B – Major Road Network Scheme</b></p> <p>The Secretary of State wrote to local authorities regarding the Major Road Network (MRN) schemes submitted in 2019 (70 nationally).</p> <p>Three schemes in the region will be reviewed by the DfT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Junction 9, M5 – key to unlocking 15,000 new homes, 100 acres of employment land and current congestion is severe.</li> <li>- Roundabout improvements on A4174 and a driver for the Western Innovation Arc and modal shift.</li> <li>- A350 Melksham Bypass – significance increased as it is a current traffic bottleneck.</li> </ul> <p>Draft letter to the Secretary of State to support continuation of these schemes was discussed.</p> <p>The Board unanimously agreed sending the letter.</p> <p><b>ACTION: JW to send the proposed letter to the Secretary of State expressing continued support for all three schemes that are in the Western Gateway area.</b></p>
6.	<p><b>Paper C – Rail Freight Feasibility Study</b></p> <p>Ian Brooker (IB), Director of Polaris, presented the study on developing a new rail freight terminal in the Avonmouth area, thanking WG for the invitation. The study highlighted the role of freight, opportunities at Avonmouth, and identified the SUEZ site as the most advantageous location. Key risks, challenges, and next steps were discussed.</p> <p>CB noted the Bristol Rail Campaign's interest in increasing services between Avonmouth and Severn Beach, which are currently hourly but previously ran twice hourly. She suggested early discussions with WECA and asked about the Hallen Loop, noting Network Rail's proposal.</p> <p>IB confirmed that the Hallen Loop is recommended in the report, as adding an extra curve could significantly speed up and simplify operations and appears feasible.</p> <p>BD highlighted that the Combined Authority has commissioned a study to identify interventions to boost rail service frequency in the area, given the expected level of development. He agreed to take this feedback to colleagues.</p>

Cllr SW welcomed the proposals as a positive step to reduce motorway and town congestion, improve air quality, reduce carbon emissions, and enhance safety. She asked about the next steps for bringing the project onto the West of England Combined Authority's agenda.

BD responded that National Highways has raised safety concerns regarding HGV interactions with traffic near motorway junctions, reinforcing the strategic importance of the scheme. In terms of progression, funding opportunities will be explored through the City Region allocations and other potential grants.

Cllr CW reiterated the STB's long-standing commitment to increasing rail freight to address regional HGV-related highway pressures. The Board welcomed the report and agreed to support progress on next steps. She thanked Polaris for their work.

7. **Paper D – Regional Centre of Excellence**

HF updated the following:

At the March board, members requested support for local authorities in delivering new housing growth. The paper outlined workstreams addressing this, including a land use and planning workshop and transport planning integration tools.

One tool provides strategic-level guidance for developments of 1,000 homes or more.

Another tool allows detailed analysis at 400x400m (urban) or 800x800m (rural) grids, assessing connectivity and accessibility to inform local plans and housing allocations. It also supports development management-level decisions.

Both tools launch this month and align with the DfT's Quantifiable Carbon Guidance (QCG) methodology.

Additionally, Western Gateway (WG) has developed a health and social value evaluation tool. A dedicated section of the WG website has been built to host the RCoE which includes the DfT core guidance and tools, serving as a centralised repository to support Local Authorities and to be updated twice yearly. The RCoE encompasses multiple workstreams. The tools, particularly the digital spatial planning tool, are attracting interest from other local authorities across England as a unified approach to assessing land use and transport connectivity.

Cllr CW thanked the team for delivering the initial work on understanding growth across the region, noting it was a valuable starting point. Raised questions regarding the geographies included in the composite mapping tool, particularly the exclusion of Green Belt areas, as these could be sustainable locations for new development. This is to be reflected in the final work to be launched.

Board members expressed appreciation for the work:

Cllr JA described it as very comprehensive.

Cllr HY highlighted the health-related elements and the efficiency of delivering this work on a modest budget.

Cllr CW thanked the team on behalf of the board, requesting access to the model once launched to better understand regional dynamics. HF acknowledged Hattie's contributions and thanks extended to her, noting her move to Peninsula.

**ACTION: HF to make the composite map more reflective in the final work that is being delivered.**



	HF noted that the work has been put up for a national award to be considered at the end of the year.
8.	<p><b>Paper E – Technical update work</b></p> <p>JW gave a brief update on current and upcoming Western Gateway work:</p> <p>Freight: Polaris will present at the joint Freight Forum with Peninsula on 23 September 2025. Freight awareness materials are now online.</p> <p>Rail: Progress continues on the Dorset Metro, West of England Line, and Westbury Platform Zero project with Network Rail. Wiltshire Council has joined as a funder.</p> <p>EV &amp; Coaches: EV working group meets in September. The Southwest Coach Forum will be held on 14 Oct, focusing on accessibility and parking.</p> <p>Cycling – There is a small budget available to begin developing the case for three of the identified strategic routes.</p> <p>Buses: Work has been delayed due to resourcing, but two new transport officers have now started, and cross-boundary issues will be progressed.</p> <p>Rural Mobility: Three pilots are underway, including the Bridport–West Bay weekend shuttle, which has carried nearly 1,500 passengers since launch in July.</p> <p>Funding: Current programme fully funded with contingency for next year; future DfT funding still to be confirmed.</p> <p>Resourcing: Two transport officers and a data officer (seconded from WECA) have joined the team.</p> <p>The Board noted the update and thanked the team.</p> <p><b>ACTION: Board members to inform JW if they wish to attend the main Freight Forum.</b></p>
9.	<p><b>Finance Update</b></p> <p>MA gave the following update:</p> <p>WG has total funding of just under £1 million (£180k from LAs and £816k from DfT). Spend to date is just over £200k, covering staff and technical programme costs. Programme management totals £500k and the technical programme just over £300k. Spend is broadly on track, with staff costs to be updated for annual increments. Consultant payments will increase towards year-end, so projects will be minimised accordingly. The contingency budget covers liabilities and risks. WG remains on track and will continue proactive monitoring.</p> <p>The report was noted.</p>
10.	<p><b>Department for Transport</b></p> <p>BK gave the following update:</p> <p>DfT sponsor for WG and South West area lead.</p> <p>Third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) covers 5 years from 2025/26/ to 2030. Settlement of over £24 billion for RIS3 period which represents £3 billion increase. Funding excludes costs associated with the development and delivery of the Lower Thames Crossing. Informed by consultation and conversations with key stakeholders. Key themes in RIS3 are operations, maintenance, renewals.</p>



Of importance is also road safety, fast and reliable journeys, good asset management, improved environmental outcomes, meeting road user needs and efficient delivery.

DfT aim to address inequalities while carrying on safety, customer service and delivery.

DfT has recommitted to five additional schemes and is working with National Highways (NH) to look at key delivery schemes. This is confirmed in the NH delivery plan, which will be published in due course. In terms of the next steps, they are working on draft Strategic Business Plan for NH. This indicates whether it believes the government's objectives can be delivered within the resources available and it will go to the Office of Road and Rail. DfT will undertake an efficiency review of the Strategic Business Plan to confirm the proposals within it. Response will be November this year and the expectation is that the final RIS will be published no later than March 2026.

Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS) – 56 members of the public were consulted via people panels across England, representing diverse groups. Sessions lasted up to 2 hours. People shared real life experiences and communicated difficulties in travel, what worked well, what could be better. INTS is built around three key principles namely People, Places and Partnership. People's needs at the centre, making travel accessible and inclusive, streamlining travel, providing dependable and safe journeys. Better connected places – aligning transport housing, health cleaner communities, technology and innovation. Partnership – empowering local leaders around decision making, optimising decision making, and improving collaboration through better data sharing. Plan is to publish the strategy later this year. Working closely with Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) and attendance at mayoral and combined authority meetings.

£900 million of funding put forward to improve bus services, which includes rural area. Individual allocations announced in autumn for LAs.

Active Travel guidance is being drafted and shared with LAs.

Local Transport Grant revenue funding has been announced recently.

Cllr CW thanked DfT for their update and highlighted the value of face-to-face discussions, especially given the significant financial responsibilities related to transport and travel. She stressed the importance of maintaining regular engagement regardless of future developments of STBs and also highlighted the Rural Bus Funding Challenges in Dorset as compared to other regions.

BK acknowledged the concerns regarding Dorset's rural bus grant, stating it was the smallest allocation among surrounding regions. The allocation formula did not meet Dorset's needs, creating challenges for residents who rely on bus services. BK noted that mayoral authorities are not expected until 2027, with no current election plans, adding uncertainty to funding and governance timelines.

Cllr MS asked about timelines for decisions on major road schemes, referencing March 2026.

BK clarified the distinction between the Strategic Road Network and the Major Road Network (MRN). Several schemes in the South West are under review, with local authority submissions due by 12 September (now closed). The MRN team will now review submissions, engaging with local authorities and area leads as required. Due to the number of schemes nationally, the review will likely take months rather than weeks, but it will be thorough.

Cllr SW raised concerns about the one-year bus grant, which makes it difficult to commission and sustain new services.

BK responded that the issue of short-term bus funding and contract extensions had been escalated during a recent quarterly review with WECA. He acknowledged the financial and administrative pressures on local authorities, especially when extending contracts under the current funding model.

Bus grant allocations are expected later this autumn, and BK will continue to push for updates to give authorities greater clarity. While no guarantees can be made, the issue is being actively monitored and raised with relevant bodies.

Cllr HY asked for assurance that bus settlements will be multi-year, as this is crucial for long-term service planning.

BK confirmed the current expectation is for a three-year settlement, in line with previous local transport grants. Information on gov.uk supports this approach. If there are any changes, local authorities will be informed promptly.

Cllr CW invited BK to provide an update to inform upcoming discussions on future STB funding.

BK acknowledged the disappointment regarding funding news but noted ministerial recognition of the value and collaborative work of STBs. A letter and brief guidance have been issued to STB Chief Executives providing advice and indicative timelines for next steps of proposal submissions. This was released the same afternoon, so many had not yet seen it.

BK encouraged regions to review the guidance, consider their preferred future structures, and provide feedback. The Department is committed to supporting STBs during this transition period.

Cllr CW responded that, although formal debate had not yet taken place, there was unanimous support for continuing the STB and focusing on future partnership and structure, rather than looking back. Further discussion will take place after the remaining agenda items.

**ACTION: WG to circulate and review the DfT guidance letter on STB future funding and structures.**

### **Network Rail (NR)**

MH offered apologies for attending remotely and reiterated the value of working with STBs on strategic rail planning, noting the geography aligns well with current and future work. Emphasized the successful track record of joint studies and expressed commitment to continuing collaboration in future STB structures.

MH provided updates on several key studies:

Gloucestershire Rail Review - Focused on the M5 corridor, aligned with Homes England and National Highways work. Builds on a previous study (4–5 years ago) to incorporate Midlands Rail Hub decisions and new station aspirations. Commenced end of August, six-month programme.

Bath–Bristol Strategic Study - Reflects high ambitions for transport and economic growth in the corridor. Started this week, with a completion date next summer. Collaborative work with Western Gateway and partners. Aims to support investable business cases based on clear transport needs.

Wiltshire Rail Investment Programme - Engineering work starting on Platform Zero at Westbury, funded by STB. Accompanied by timetabling work funded by Wiltshire Council, both due by end of the year. Will underpin a business case for reinstating platforms and improving local and inter-regional services. Aligns with wider proposals to improve Wiltshire connectivity, considered a priority for the rail network.

Avonmouth Terminal Study - MH noted satisfaction with progress and commitment to support Western Gateway and partners in future development.

Heathrow Expansion – Western Access - Work underway on access to Heathrow in light of possible airport expansion. Direct Western Rail access may re-emerge as a key opportunity to improve connectivity from the Western Gateway area, helping to meet environmental targets.

JR provided updates on the following:

He thanked WG for collaboration on Tisbury and Dorset Metro projects. Acknowledged that while Dorset Metro outcomes were not as positive as hoped, collaboration on the multimodal work with WG will continue. Overall, the engagement has been a positive and productive experience for the team.

Reported on soil moisture deficit issues on the West of England line, caused by dry weather affecting track geometry, leading to service reductions (1 train every 2 hours). Plans to use performance data to assess how network improvements could mitigate similar disruptions in future. Work continues with SWR on vegetation clearance and infrastructure adjustments. Integrated Network Rail/SWR executive structure will be established in October–November, coinciding with SWR’s move under DfT Operator. GBR legislation is expected in 2027, with early work underway to strengthen collaboration.

Cllr CW noted two public questions: one regarding rolling stock shortages, and one regarding Westerleigh Junction.

JR provided an update on rolling stock:

- Class 158/159 units, which run on the West of England line, will reach end of life in the mid-2030s.
- Work is underway with SWR, and GWR is reviewing its wider fleet replacement strategy.
- DfT is preparing a national rolling stock strategy, with a meeting expected in October/November to outline plans.
- Options being explored include partial electrification and battery train solutions.
- Timelines will depend on DfT’s rolling stock strategy announcement.

Cllr CW asked about timelines for Westerleigh Junction improvements, noting that the zone has been protected in the Local Plan, but clarity is needed on when work might start.

MH explained that:

- The scheme is considered a high priority bottleneck on the western route.
- Significant feasibility work has been done to prepare a strong business case.
- The junction is nearly at capacity, but funding remains a major challenge.
- No confirmed delivery date exists; focus remains on readiness and evidence-building to secure future funding.
- MH offered to share more detailed information with partners and consider a bigger role for partners in advocacy.

Cllr SW welcomed the Bath–Bristol Strategic Study and asked whether it includes Saltford Station and other new station opportunities, emphasizing the importance of Saltford for reducing congestion in Bath.

MH confirmed that the study does include new station opportunities, including Saltford.

MH will share the study remit and group representation details with Cllr SW and others after the meeting. Open to ensuring appropriate local representation in the process.

**ACTION: MH to share detailed information on Westerleigh Junction feasibility with Cllr SW and explore partner roles in strengthening the case.**

**National Highways (NH):**

ZA provided the following updates:

Reiterated strong support for the work of STBs.

M48 Severn Bridge – A 7.5-tonne weight restriction for HGVs was introduced on 27 May as a medium-term measure. Ongoing engagement with South Wales Trunk Road Agency, local authorities, businesses, and hauliers to identify solutions for reinstating HGV access. Feedback, traffic modelling and feasibility work underway. Preferred option to be confirmed in autumn 2025, with implementation planned by October 2026.

A417 Missing Link – Offline construction progressing well. Earthworks completed in 2024 have enabled bridge foundations and piling. Installation of 5,320-tonne pre-stressed concrete beams started at Shab Valley Junction; work also underway at Cowley Junction. Cowley Roundabout contraflow in place until 2027. Planned closure (12–15 September) postponed due to weather; rescheduling required. Project customer hub open Tuesdays and Wednesdays (10:00–14:00) for public engagement.

A303 Sparkford to Ilchester – Landscaping underway; completion expected by Christmas 2025.

A432 Badminton Road Bridge – Piling completed in early summer. Final M4 weekend closure to lift steel beams planned for 10–13 October.

New bridge on track to open early 2026.

BD raised concerns regarding the Eastville flyover and M32 works, highlighting the impact of progressive slip road closures on Bristol and South Gloucestershire networks. Requested careful management of local network impacts and consideration of mitigation measures.

Cllr CW thanked ZA and National Highways for a more responsive approach regarding new housing targets and growth pressures. Requested that thanks be passed back to the team.

ZA acknowledged thanks and committed to continuing the collaborative approach.

11.

**AOB**

**Future of STBs and Regional Collaboration**

AC introduced a discussion on the future of STBs in light of recent correspondence from the Department for Transport (DfT), including letters from Conrad Bailey and colleagues. Noted that the situation varies nationally:

- In the North, there is widespread coverage of Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs).
- In the South and South West, MCA coverage is limited (e.g., only WECA currently in place), with no major changes expected soon.

Emphasized that despite funding changes, the regional role of STBs remains valuable, with no clear replacement structure in place.

Highlighted the need to develop a short-medium, and long-term proposition, including funding plans, to submit to DfT by December 2025.

Intention is to continue STB functions in some form, potentially with a leaner model and diversified funding sources.

Suggested establishing a working group to explore options and report back by December.

Cllr CW noted that if more funding responsibility falls to local partners, there is an opportunity to shape the STB to suit regional needs.

Cllr HY raised concerns about fair funding implications and potential disparities between authorities in future funding settlements. Highlighted budget pressures and the need to understand the likely distribution of funding across the region. Noted that Strategic Transport and Investment Plans (STPs/SIPs) were developed under a previous government and before new housing and economic growth targets. Stressed the importance of reviewing and updating the SIP to reflect new national policies and strategies. Suggested maintaining a structured forum to support this review process. Emphasized the value of continued collaboration with Peninsula Transport, regardless of future governance structures.

Cllr CW emphasized a key message for DfT to take back regarding the need to review SIPs in light of changing national policy and timing considerations. Agreed that all STBs face similar challenges reviewing SIPs considering new government priorities and housing targets. Highlighted the timing issue of implementing governance changes while simultaneously updating SIPs, and the need for sufficient time to complete the SIP review.

Cllr MS highlighted that due to organizational changes in Wiltshire, joining a combined authority is not expected in the near future. Emphasized the importance of Western Gateway STB providing continuity for strategic, cross-boundary transport discussions, as future combined authorities will likely cover smaller geographic areas.

Cllr EP reflected on the impact and successes of the WG STB to date, including work on rail, coaches, freight, and shared prioritization on MRN and strategic schemes. Suggested preparing an options appraisal to determine how to continue collaboration in a leaner but effective way. Stressed the need to update priorities in light of local plans, revised housing targets, and new growth plans. Requested DfT guidance on how to frame future priorities and collaboration over the next 2–3 years. Proposed holding an informal workshop in late October/early November to discuss options ahead of the December deadline.

Cllr CW agreed with the proposal and suggested officers engage with DfT, National Highways, Network Rail, and Peninsula Transport to develop proposals. Confirmed intent to arrange the informal workshop for late October or early November.

Cllr HY raised a question to DfT about whether STBs will retain their role in prioritizing major schemes or whether individual authorities will revert to direct discussions with DfT.

BK acknowledged the importance of the question and encouraged the STB to highlight the benefits of collective prioritization in their future proposals. Noted this aligns with the forthcoming Integrated National Transport Strategy, which emphasizes integration and collaboration. Will feedback internally on the importance of STB-led scheme prioritization and integration.

MA thanked Wiltshire Council for hosting the meeting.

Cllr CW closed the meeting by thanking all attendees for their contributions.

	<p><b>ACTION:</b> WG Officers to engage with DfT, National Highways, Network Rail, and Peninsula Transport to develop options for future governance and collaboration, including funding approaches and strategic priorities.</p>
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	<p>WG officers to arrange an informal workshop for late October/early November to review draft proposals.</p>
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