

Western Gateway (WG) Partnership Board Meeting

Wednesday 25 February, 13:00-15:00

Attendees	
Name	Organisation
Cllr Chris Willmore	South Gloucestershire Council (CW)
Cllr Ed Plowden	Bristol City Council (EP)
Cllr Hugh Malyan	North Somerset Council (HM)
Cllr Ian Boulton	South Gloucestershire Council (deputising for MCA Mayor) (IB)
Cllr Jon Andrews	Dorset Council (JA)
Cllr Martin Smith	Wiltshire 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 Council (BCP) (AE)
Andy Whitehead	South Gloucestershire Council (AW)
Jack Wiltshire	Dorset Council (JWi)
Kimberley Corps	Wiltshire Council (KC)
Lindsay Margerison	Bath and North East Somerset Council (LM)
Louise McBride	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (LMcB)
Orlagh Phipps	Gloucestershire County Council (OP)
Steve Thorne	North Somerset Council (ST)
Ben Kempner	Department for Transport (BK)
Dan Taylor	Department for Transport (DT)
Hannah Fountain	Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) (HF)
James White	Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) (JWh)
Jessica Holroyd	Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) (JH)
Mena Abidakun	Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) (MA)
Robert Smith	Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) (RS)
Tim Woodhead	Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) (TW)
Andrew Nicolson	Public participant (AN)
Caroline Dunn	Public participant (CD)
Christina Biggs	Public participant (CB)
David Redgewell	Public participant (DR)
Rosa Kell	Public participant (RK)
Apologies	
Cllr Andy Hadley	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP)
Colin Chick	Gloucestershire County Council (CC)

Jacob Pryor	Bristol City Council (JP)
Jaime Rockhill	Network Rail (JR)
Matt Haywood	Network Rail (MH)
Zoe Arnold	National Highways (ZA)
Allan Creedy	Western Gateway STB (AC)

Actions	Allocated to
Draft a protocol to manage non-payment of Local Authority contribution	WGSTB
<p>BK to find out latest on project Coral.</p> <p>RESPONSE: The contract award is expected this month. There is a LTA drop-in session hosted by WMCA also happening this month. Let DfT know if you haven't seen the invitation and the project team at WMCA will be informed.</p>	BK
<p>BK to follow up on bus grant letter.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Bus grant letters were issued on 2 March 2026. These form part of the new consolidated funding arrangement.</p> <p>Distribution details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities received letters earlier in the week Mayoral Combined Authorities received theirs later on. <p>The letters included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of the Bus Services Fund. Associated Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and related documentation. <p>Initial feedback from local authorities has been generally positive.</p>	BK
<p>BK to follow up on speed limit guidance.</p> <p>RESPONSE: The Department is progressing work on a new edition of the best practice guidance: Setting Local Speed Limits. This will be published alongside updated guidance on the use of speed cameras and red-light cameras. The work forms part of the Road Safety Strategy. The guidance is still in development, and stakeholders will be kept informed as the work progresses.</p>	BK
<p>BK will come back regarding health and safety issues of cross-pavement and charging gulleys.</p> <p>RESPONSE: A Delivery Blueprint for Cross Pavement Solutions (Section 3.4) has been circulated to local authorities to help address these issues. The blueprint outlines guidance that authorities can use to review installations and consider safety aspects. This document was previously shared with BCP and Dorset councils approximately two</p>	BK

months ago to support their discussions and provide a consistent framework.	
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Ref	Notes / Actions
1.	<p>Welcome, apologies and introductions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allan Creedy, the Lead Officer is unwell. • Colin Chick sends his apologies as he is on leave. • Cllr Hadley also sends his apologies for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. • Apologies received from Network Rail and National Highways • The confidential matter (item 5) will be considered in public session.
2.	<p>Public participation:</p> <p>Mr David Redgewell:</p> <p>Mr Redgewell stated that money is going to Northern Powerhouse Rail, Northern Transport Board and the West Midlands Mayoral Combined Authority and the West Midlands Railway Executive and towards buses in the North, but this money is not being invested into the South West and the question was why is this the case. There is also no money for accessibility.</p> <p>JW introduced himself as the Technical Lead for the Western Gateway STB. He flagged that Western Gateway STB (WGSTB) is heading into the convenor and advocacy role and making the case for change, which is in the work plan for 26/27. Looking at doing case for change for Southern part of geography, alongside Peninsula Transport.</p> <p>BK, South West area lead for the Department for Transport, recognises the challenges in the South West. The government has committed huge funding for transport over next 4 years. He emphasised it is important to keep the key collaboration with Western Gateway STB going forward in terms of putting forward key business cases with rail. With regards to buses, they have continued with funding for 4-year period for buses to give certainty to local transport authorities across the country including the South West. He emphasised that rural is a key part of the South West. He advised the STBs to continue the work they are doing.</p> <p>Ms Rosa Kell:</p> <p>Ms Kell asked about operation Coral which is very important in light of bus operators truncating lines, meaning passenger journeys are split up. Ms Kell asked for an update regarding single ticketing.</p> <p>JW responded that WGSTB has been asked to provide local authorities with the information, however, there has not been the resource to do this. WGSTB has been involved with Midlands Connect on the project but hasn't had resources to go out to local authorities to deep dive on operators and infrastructure. WGSSTB remain supportive of proposal, and it was going to be part</p>

	<p>of its proposed bus work for 26/27, however due to less funding this work has had to be put on hold.</p> <p>Cllr Willmore emphasised how important this is.</p> <p>BK proactively said he will try to find out more about project Coral, and emphasised that Peninsula Transport had been in touch with project Coral towards the end of last year.</p> <p>ACTION: BK to find out latest on project Coral.</p> <p>Ms Christina Biggs:</p> <p>Ms Biggs would like assurance that National Rail will be including the North East Cord into the Avonmouth freight terminal. Ms Biggs would like to see the costings for this worked up, and would like to see a connection between Henbury East and Severn Beach.</p> <p>Cllr Willmore said that freight work is included in the technical programme update and is likely to be moving into leadership and governance model. It may move to a WECA led process.</p> <p>Mr Andrew Nicolson from Wiltshire Climate Alliance:</p> <p>Mr Nicolson asked where all the statements could be read. It was responded that all the statements and responses will be put on the website. This was done in the meeting. These can be viewed at: February 2026 - Western Gateway</p>
3.	<p>Paper B - Technical Programme Progress Update</p> <p>JW provided an update on the technical programme.</p> <p>WGSTB has been working with Peninsula Transport on the freight forum and both took part in Logistics UK event back in January.</p> <p>Work is nearing completion on Westbury Platform 0. It was jointly funded by WGSTB and Wiltshire Council. There will be a report published next month.</p> <p>WGSTB will continue engaging with Connected Cities Catapult on the Bath and Wiltshire Metro. They are looking at doing a rail case for change document.</p> <p>WGSTB has launched its Spatial Planning Tool as part of the Centre of Excellence work. There has been training undertaken with local authorities and there are planned upgrades in the pipeline. It has been shortlisted for a national transport decarbonisation award.</p> <p>Mapping work is being undertaken on the resilience work.</p> <p>The rural mobility pilots progressing well. The first round is nearing completion. There will be 10 pilot schemes across two STBs by the time these have been completed.</p> <p>Cllr Warren asked what the role of WGSTB with regards to EV that is differing from the constituent Local Authorities. WGSTB brings together stakeholders from across the South West, along with Peninsula Transport. It's a knowledge-sharing forum for participants across the South West, bringing together all Local Authorities in the region to share challenges, discuss solutions that</p>

	<p>have worked, and exchange best practice. The forum also invites speakers to present on relevant topics of interest. The STB role is a convener.</p> <p>Ms Caroline Dunn raised interchange guidance and active travel and spatial planning and health guidance and if sight of this could be provided. WGSTB replied these are not fully complete yet but will be published in due course on the website. WGSTB clarified that the health and safety evaluation guidance is essentially a spreadsheet that can be used by local authority officers for evaluation of specific schemes so will be of a limited use of interest to non-officers.</p> <p>Cllr Willmore emphasised that public questions are over.</p> <p>It was asked if there were more updates for the DRT and insights to share. It was clarified the evaluation will happen in April.</p> <p>The recommendation was agreed by the Partnership Board.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION:</p> <p>The members of the Board are recommended to note the progress of the programme update report.</p>
	<p>Paper C – Finance Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WGSTB were funded just under £1 million for this financial year. By end of December, just over £628k had been spent. That level of spend is consistent with the WGSTB delivery profile as technical work once milestones are completed. • Spend is expected to increase in the final quarter as work reaches completion and invoices are submitted. • Forecasting year-end expenditure of £783k. • Contingency of £213k which allows management of emerging risk and to response to pressures of programme. • Spending on staff for the year to date is around £450k. Recent staff departures create underspend. • Spend to date for technical programme is just under £200k. • Forecast spend for year is £232k. This is milestone based. This may change in next reporting period as there are some upcoming pieces of work around spatial planning being upgraded. • WGSTB will continue to review and update the position as through financial quarter. • Cllr Willmore thanked MA for managing finance in a great period of significant change. <p>The recommendation was agreed by the Partnership Board.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION:</p> <p>The members of the Board are recommended to note the current financial position to the end of Quarter 3 2025/26.</p>
4.	<p>Updates from associates</p>

Apologies received from Network Rail and National Highways (provided a written update).

Ben Kempner, the South West area lead, gave an update from the DfT:

- Launched web-based connectivity tool a few months ago.
- Demand Responsive Transport Guidance was published on gov.uk. Alongside this the Impact Evaluation of phase two of the Rural Mobility Fund monitoring and evaluation process was published.
- On EV, hauliers and fleet operators given discounts of up to £120k. Part of an 18 million funding announcement back in January. Part of a wider £318 million investment towards greener freight. Similar to the successful electric car grant.
- Recently introduced the Get That Electric Feeling campaign, which was launched on the 19th January 2026 encouraging EV uptake.
- Legislation being worked on regarding invalid carriage regulations – 12-week consultation launched beginning of January inviting users with accessibility lived experiences to share feedback on how to modernise the legislation.
- Pavement parking consultation – options for change live on 9th January 2026. Secondary legislation launched later in the year.
- Floating bus stop guidance issued recently on gov.uk.
- Bus franchising manual released recently on gov.uk.
- Enhanced partnership guidance is still being produced.
- Structures fund survey - looking at renovations and repairs of structures like bridges. Sending out survey to see how local authorities to see how the fund is working.

Clr Willmore asked when the criteria on spending for the bus grant will be released.

It was also asked in relation to the bridges study, what the impact the switch to EV buses would have on bridge loading.

A question was asked when speed limit guidance will be released.

BK responded that the bus grant letter is due very soon.

ACTION: BK to follow up on bus grant letter.

BK is unsure on speed limit guidance.

ACTION: BK to follow up on speed limit guidance.

BK is unsure if any specific work has been done on speed limit guidance but encourages local authorities use the free text which is included in the survey mentioned.

There was interest on LEVI work and what insights have emerged from other local authorities. BK said there has been issues with parking spaces and vandalism of EV areas. Awareness of EV needs to increase and changing behaviours. There have not been issues regarding electricity supply for LEVI.

There was a query regarding the rankings on maintenance and the lack of dialogue around these. BK said there is a resource challenge but recognises the impact of the report being issued on a

	<p>Sunday and lessons have been learned from the communication side. Colleagues can write in about the rankings to BK.</p> <p>There was a query on cross-pavement and charging gulleys. There is no resource of revenue grant for setting up or providing the necessary organisation to carry out the work.</p> <p>There are a range of views on how the authority regulation needs to be. Is there a steer from the DfT on this.</p> <p>ACTION: BK will come back regarding health and safety issues of cross-pavement and charging gulleys.</p> <p>BK reported there is still LEVI revenue grant coming through.</p> <p>The importance of sharing best practise in the EV forum provided by WGSTB and Peninsula Transport was emphasised.</p> <p>The reviewing budget line for WGSTB by DfT was queried. BK confirmed this is part of instalments and reassured that as long as WGSTB are carrying out the work in the programme there are unlikely to be issues.</p> <p>Wiltshire are going to be using its own contractor for cross-pavement channels.</p> <p>Demand Responsive Transport Guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/demand-responsive-transport</p> <p>DfT email: drt@dft.gov.uk</p> <p>National Highways update report is on the Western Gateway website.</p>
5	<p>WGSTB going forward</p> <p>The Board is able to have conversation regarding STB funding and its use going forward in a public setting, which is accountable and transparent. The paper will be going up into the public domain in due course.</p> <p>JW introduced the background of WGSTB. DfT announced STB funding end 2027. £450k confirmed in January 2026 (-£150k funding gap). The Local Authorities will be providing funding aside from BCP. Some core work will remain, however a few areas will be put on hold (buses, resilience, technical support, Avonmouth rail freight and coach work), while WGSTB moves to more of a convenor and advisory/advocacy role. Staff changes have also created space for saving. The revised budget for 2026/27 is £716k.</p> <p>There were no questions from Board members.</p> <p>BCP are not providing contribution for 2026/27. There is no provision to cover for it. The consensus is that this would like to be dealt with sensitively and find a protocol for managing the situation. This will be brought to next Board meeting.</p> <p>ACTION: WGSTB to draft a protocol for managing this.</p>

The recommendations were **agreed** by a super majority of the Partnership Board.

1. Acceptance of the Department for Transport grant of £450,000 for 2026/27.
2. Funding for 2026/27 and 2027/28 as set out in Table One, Table Two and Table Three.
3. Revised Work Plan for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix One

The fourth recommendation is ‘Progression of option 2 for the STP/SIP light touch review outlined in section 3 and table Five’.

The Strategic Transport Plan (STP) was produced in March 2024 and Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) a year later in March 2025. During this time there were limitations – STP developed under previous government, and notification in increase in housing growth (not knowing where the growth would occur). STBs may also not stay in existence as initially intended with questions around the degree in which the STP and SIP are refreshed.

WGSTB has overlaid the identified scheme with new housing growth. These highlights areas of housing growth that are not well aligned with SIP (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and West Dorset).

WGSTB have looked at adding a metric to the existing scoring framework and rescoring proposals on this to close the gap. However, there are not enough proposals for these under-represented areas of the SIP. Another other option is to open resubmissions from all, or invite the areas underrepresented to submit proposals. This was explored with Senior Transport Officers but there was not a single clear direction. However, the emerging suggestion was to start with a light touch that looks to capture growth for housing employment and include some refinements for some other metrics. Could then look at additional stages – introducing a weighting factor so can align assessment with current government priorities.

Option 4 is to open up the SIP to new proposals. Each increase in stages requires more work and cost. Option 2 is just officer time. Option 4 may need to require an update of current environmental impact assessment. The recommended approach in the report is to start with Option 2.

Cllr Plowden asked how seriously DfT would take this approach. He felt it would be necessarily for officers to start with Options 2 and 3 straight away, and delegate to officers, changes in the multi-criteria assessment. Wary of starting the process again. If Option 4 is felt necessary, then he suggests it is brought back to a meeting (advisory group). Cllr Warren agrees with this approach and wants an option that will allow them to improve bus and train travel across boundaries in a way that hasn't been accounted for in the existing strategic plan.

Cllr Willmore said that within the Western Gateway STB there was a small member advisory panel which was led by Cllr Young.

BK said the STP is seen as a very valuable and baseline evidence working document. It has a huge meaning behind it. To do nothing would be to lose the momentum. From a DfT perspective, BK is still a sponsor and takes it seriously and wants to work alongside WGSTB and recognises the value STBs bring where despite the funding decrease the momentum and collaboration does not have to stop. They are keen to keep working with us. He said previous years full funding came with conditions (eg annual updates to STP/SIP). Those conditions no longer apply as STBs now have the autonomy and flexibility to make the decisions on their work plan. The light touch

recommendation seems sensible considering other work to be done alongside this. It is worth working towards the spending review with some of the schemes. The financial situation is difficult right across the country.

Cllr Smith asked if the housing allocations represent the current NPPF and how do you put numbers into locations. He asked if housing being required near railway stations is reflective in the model. He also flagged that in Wiltshire they are trying to make a business case for a station in Corsham and asked where it sits.

WGSTB responded that the identified areas for growth have come from our partner authorities based on available evidence at the time. Wiltshire is REG 19 and is based on housing figures expected to deliver through this – therefore accommodating new growth will not be in the map. Rail schemes are well represented in the SIP. However, to assess schemes in the SIP there needed to be a certain degree of information available like cost estimates and area benefits. WGSTB did not think Corsham had the figures available.

WGSTB confirmed all assessment metrics are on a regionally wide scale. This is case for housing and employment growth metric. Anything proposed near to a border would benefit.

At previous meetings there was a clear steer to a light touch approach. It is now being heard that maybe we need to be further along from the light touch, accepting Option 2 and heading into Option 3 and reporting into the future meeting of the Board. A reopening of submissions for detailed review may be a conversation for the next Board meeting.

Cllr Warren said that Corsham is not mentioned in the SIP, and it is essential that it is featured. She would like to know what option would enable this. WGSTB confirmed this would be Option 4. The consensus is for officers to see how far they can proceed and then see the scale of the gap. Cllr Plowden would be happy to proceed with Option 3. If there are schemes like Corsham then they need to have significant level of detail, and a focus on the areas lacking schemes that were identified where there is a gap. It would be helpful to have an outline of costings for this.

Cllr Willmore proposes moving straight to Option 3. It was felt that all authorities can review and if there are schemes that have moved forward exponentially, they can be put up for reconsideration. Option 3 was voted on by all but 1. This was a majority decision. There will be a lead member in place to assist WGSTB and the Chair and Vice Chair, with an informal mechanism to work with the officers. In summary it is option 3, delegated to officers in consultation with lead members and reporting back to next board – with authorities in the interim flagging if there is anything critical.

The recommendations were **agreed** by a super majority of the Partnership Board, meaning Option 3 as the preferred option was adopted. Cllr Andrews wanted it to be noted he supported Option 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The members of the Board are recommended to approve:

- I. Acceptance of the Department for Transport grant of £450,000 for 2026/27
- II. Funding for 2026/27 and 2027/28 as set out in Table One, Table Two and Table Three
- III. Revised Work Plan for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix One

	IV. Progression of Option 3 for the STP/SIP light touch review outlined in section 3 and Table Five.
6	AOB HF is sadly leaving us in 8 days going to work for WECA. A big thanks to Hannah Fountain for her work.

DRAFT