

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper B

Date **25 February 2026**

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.

April – June 2025

- Finalised grant offer to three successful organisations and kick off Rural Mobility Pilot – phase 1
- Delivered Freight awareness workshops and produced workshop reports
- Finalised Coach (phase 2 and phase 3) feasibility study reports
- Completion of Coach Parking survey/report
- Developed Regional Centre of Excellence Hub (online portal for local authority officers to access a range of tools and information)
- Finalised Strategic Cycle Network plan and route development study
- Appointed Polaris Consultancy to conduct a feasibility study for a rail freight terminal site at Avonmouth
- Hosted successful freight, EV, coach and land use planning forums for local authority officers and wider stakeholders.
- Service agreement for Westbury Platform Zero feasibility study agreed with Network Rail and relevant stakeholders.
- Welcomed Department for Transport Operator to the Rail Officer Group to brief officers on transition process of South Western Railway and other train companies to public ownership.

- Engaged with National Wealth Fund at Senior Officer Group to discuss funding opportunities for climate action and economic growth in the transport sector.

July – September 2025

- Finalised strategic outline business case (SOBC) report for the West of England Line and Dorset Metro work.
- Approved commencement of Dorset Metro Multi Modal Corridor work
- Engaged with the Energy Saving Trust, Network Distributions and Charge Point Operators and other stakeholders across the South West to support the roll out of Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure.
- Election of chair and vice chair of the WG Partnership Board
- Approval of draft letter to the Secretary of State expressing continued support for Major Road Network Scheme
- Welcomed Polaris consultant to the WG Partnership Board for a presentation on the identified site for the Avonmouth rail freight terminal.

October – December 2025

- Development of a digital spatial and transport planning tool to support Local Authority officers with housing site allocations and assessment in the region
- Finalised the Interchange Guidance and Active Travel, Social Value and Health guidance as part of Centre of Excellence for Local Authorities
- Publication of summary report for 2024/25 freight work, including evaluation of the backloading trial
- Commence work on scoping of Resilience study
- Spatial and transport planning tool shortlisted for a National Decarbonising Transport Awards
- Finalised the development of a password-protected website area as a repository of resources/tools for Local Authorities
- Finalised grant offer to three successful organisations and kick off Rural Mobility Pilot – phase 2
- Hosted successful EV forum for local authority officers and wider stakeholders.
- Welcomed interns from University of the West of England
- Convened partnership groups with Local Authorities, Homes England, National Highways, Active Travel England and Network Rail to advance vision-led land use and transport planning

January – March 2026

- Complete work on modelling future transport scenarios
- Welcomed DfT funding settlement for 2026/27
- Hosting of Freight and Coach forums for local authorities and wider stakeholders
- Completion of Westbury Platform Zero feasibility study with Network Rail
- Engagement at the Logistics UK South West event
- Engagement at the Bath and Wiltshire Metro workshop

- Welcomed intern from University of Gloucestershire and University of the West of England
- Board approval of Business Plan for 2026/27
- Delivering of training sessions on the Spatial Planning and Transport Tool

2. Freight Strategy Implementation and freight forums

- 2.1 Progress Update: In December we finalised and published the report of work achieved by Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport across freight from April 2024 to December 2025. We attended Logistics UK South West, running a session to find out how local authorities across the south west can help better facilitate the freight industry. Outcomes of this were taken to the South West Freight Forum in January 2026 for further input, and will be presented to the constituent authorities, along with possible options for this.
- 2.2 The January 2026 Southwest Freight Forum had speakers from Network Rail, and from Connected places catapult, covering rail freight growth and a green shipping corridor pilot along the southern coast. There was lots of engagement with both these topics, and enthusiasm for the next forum in March 2026.
- 2.3 Work on the next steps for the Avonmouth Rail Freight Terminal has been on hold although discussions on bringing in other partners has started.
- 2.4 An industry survey was launched on 17 November to gather insights into the principal challenges facing the private freight sector in the South West. The questions were designed to better understand operational constraints and to identify opportunities for improved collaboration between the public and private sectors in order to support more efficient freight movements across the region. The findings will be shared with Local Authority officers and will inform discussions at a forthcoming South West Freight Forum meeting
- 2.5 Next Steps/Upcoming priorities: Freight engagement work will be reviewed to feed into the local authorities, and we will endeavour to support them with this. We are working to finalise the agenda for the next freight forum at the end of March, which will have speakers from UWE and the aviation sector.

3. Rail Strategy – Westbury Platform 0

- 3.1 Progress Update: Work commissioned to Network Rail for reinstating Platform 0 at Westbury station, improving regional rail capacity and connectivity. This supports future projects like the Devizes Gateway station, Melksham line upgrades, and additional Pewsey stops. The study includes the engineering feasibility of reinstating the platform, timetable planning for the Melksham single line upgrade and for additional calls at Pewsey station (at additional cost). The project budget is being met through a 70% contribution from Western Gateway and 30% from Wiltshire Council. Work on the study is progressing well. For reinstating the platform the minimum viable product (Network Rail approach for the most cost effective scheme) is looking good whilst for the timetabling work

and the Melksham single line there are currently no showstoppers. Work is expected to be completed by the end of March 2026 and will be reported to the Board.

3.2 Next Steps/Upcoming Priorities: The Western Gateway continues to support emerging proposals for the Bath to Wiltshire Metro led by Connected Cities Catapult and the officer of Brian Matthews M.P. for Melksham. The Western Gateway's work on Westbury Platform 0 and the Melksham single line are key to the Metro proposals unlocking capacity for new stations and services. The Western Gateway with Wiltshire Council and Network Rail will explore options for taking the Metro proposals forward.

3.3 Work has started on a rail case for change document bringing together the various rail schemes supported by the Western Gateway. The intention is to use the document to advocate the need for investment in our rail network. It may form part of a wider case for change approach for the southern part of the Western Gateway areas incorporating the A303 and the M4 to South Coast Study.

4. Electric Vehicle Charging

4.1 Progress Update: We are finalising the EV forum agenda for the next forum on the 10th March 2026, and are exploring agenda options for further forum engagement.

5. Coach Strategy

5.1 Progress Update: Limited progress on coach this quarter due to resourcing limitations and uncertainties. Agreed to continue the Coach Forum (at least on short term basis) in partnership with Peninsula Transport. To note that one of the new Rural Mobility Pilot projects includes a coach dimension.

5.2 Next Steps/Upcoming Priorities: Next Coach Forum (with Peninsula Transport) will take place on Friday 27th February 2026.

6. Rural Mobility

6.1 Progress Update: Good progress on the rural mobility pilots this quarter as three come into their final phases and three new ones reach inception. Full outcomes for the 2024/25 pilots will be reported next Board when the evaluations are complete, but preliminary results are:

- Bridport – West Bay weekend shuttle bus. Overall patronage is great, but has fallen a bit short of the target patronage of 300 passengers per weekend (except in the core summer months) but use has been steady and the service is very well regarded. Bridport Town Council are securing funding to continue running the service on Saturdays beyond the pilot period

- Consumer marketing research and campaign to maximise uptake of the Robin Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) amongst target groups (young people and access to nature). Research phases and opportunities complete and promotional activities underway in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council. Findings applicable to rural DRT projects throughout country – a report will be produced.
- Sustainable Mobility Club in Forest of Dean (electric car club and bike loan). It's fair to say this project has had a lot of teething troubles! But these are all useful learnings from a pilot project. Forest of Dean Council are securing resource to continue the project beyond the funded pilot, to get the most out of everything achieved so far.

6.2 Next steps/Upcoming Priorities: New projects for 26/27 will be beginning in the next two months. These include:

- A shuttle bus on Friday and Saturday nights linking Lyme Regis and Bridport, led by Lyme Regis Town Council
- A scheme combining real-time parking information with coach/tour operator collaboration to ease visitor pressure and improve sustainable access to the Cotswolds
- A project with local stakeholders to identify a range of integrated rural transport solutions rural transport in south east Dorset, led by Dorset Council

7. Regional Centre of Excellence

7.1 Progress Update: Co-developed Spatial and Transport Planning Tool (SPT) launched over Christmas period. Training sessions delivered to LA officers in February and the tool is now in operation. The tool has been shortlisted for a national transport decarbonisation award.

7.2 Next Steps/Upcoming Priorities:

- Continue to actively support with training and use of the SPT
- Some upgrades to be made to the SPT in response to feedback, including a visualisation of the Connectivity Tool scores and Technical note to guide appropriate use
- Other SPT upgrades and ongoing hosting arrangements being scoped
- Updates to the Carbon Assessment Playbook being scoped to support with new duty on LAs to report user carbon forecasts from proposed projects and proposals through Local Transport Delivery Plans (and expected to be required in the forthcoming LTP guidance)
- Future workshops and engagement activities being scoped.
- Transport Decarbonisation Awards being judged on 27th March 2026.

8. Resilience

8.1 Progress Update: We have been refining the scope, defining what is to be covered and the future climate to be used in the assessment, ensuring that the

assessment is relevant and proportionate. Consulting with partners, have been collating and preparing various datasets for the assessment. We will be working through the allocation of scores against the different hazards to produce mapping across the Western Gateway area based on this data.

- 8.2 Next Steps/Upcoming Priorities: We will continue to collate and prepare the data for assessment and arrange a stakeholder meeting to discuss some of the relative weighting, and to bring in local specific knowledge.

9. Consultation, communication and engagement

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

10. Equalities Implications

- 10.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups.

11. Legal considerations

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

12. Financial considerations

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

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 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. The Board is recommended to note these.