

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper D

Date **24th June 2026**

Title of report: **Rural Mobility Pilots update and decision**

Purpose of report: **To provide progress on Rural Mobility Pilots and decision on allocating Lead Member for next call for pilots (Round 3)**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Note progress on the current Rural Mobility Pilot projects
- II. Approve the appointment of Lead Member(s) and delegate authority to finalise and issue the Pilot Prospectus (Round 3).
- III. Approve the delegation of authority to the appointed Lead Member(s) for the assessment of pilot proposals and the approval of successful applications.

1. Background

- 1.1 In March 2022, following Board approval, the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB), in partnership with Peninsula Transport STB, published the [South-West-Rural-Mobility-Strategy](#). This strategy outlined a shared commitment by both STBs to secure funding to support the development and delivery of rural mobility pilot projects across the Southwest region.
- 1.2 At the Partnership Board meeting in October 2024 and March 2025, an allocation of £60,000 each was approved within the Western Gateway STB Business Plan to support rural mobility initiatives. These were matched by similar contributions from Peninsula Transport for pilot projects in their region.
- 1.3 At the Partnership Board in November 2024 and June 2025, two Cabinet Members each were nominated as Lead Members to provide strategic leadership for the Rural Mobility Pilot Programme and to make decisions on successful applications.
- 1.4 At the Partnership Board in December 2025, a further £50,000 was allocated within the 2026/27 Work Plan submitted to the Department for Transport. As a result, Western Gateway is planning to launch a third round of pilot projects later this year and is seeking approval for a number of decisions to support the

governance, oversight, and delivery of the application and assessment process.

2. Current progress – Recommendation 1

2.1 Western Gateway and Peninsula Transport STBs carried out a call for rural mobility pilots in 2024 and 2025 respectively, further details on the process can be found on the Western Gateway website here – [Call for pilot application 2024](#) and [Call for Pilot application 2025](#). Both STBs have led the development of rural mobility policy in the Southwest and have supported, and continue to support, the delivery of ten pilot projects between 2024 and 2026, testing innovative approaches to improving access to transport, services and opportunities in rural areas.

2.2 Across the Western Gateway region, six pilot projects have been funded through the first two rounds of applications, with three projects approved in 2024 and a further three in 2025. Details of the six pilots and their current status are set out below:

1. Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership – Enhancing Access to Rural Spaces (Round 1)

A community - led research and engagement initiative exploring how Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) can support access to free-to-access green spaces across the South Cotswolds and Vale of Berkeley region. Targeting youth and underserved communities, the project team will develop travel confidence resources including a "Let's Talk DRT" booklet.

This project has now been successfully completed, with all planned activities delivered and key lifecycle findings captured within the final evaluation report. The pilot achieved strong engagement and provided a clear evidence base to inform future rural mobility delivery.

The findings indicate that awareness and understanding of DRT remain the main barriers to wider uptake, rather than the quality of the service itself. Feedback from existing users was generally positive, highlighting the importance of clear communication, simple user journeys, and building public confidence in the service. The evaluation also reinforces the value of DRT in addressing transport challenges in rural areas, where it can play an important role in improving access to services, opportunities, and green spaces. The full detail of the key findings is set out in the evaluation report, which will be published on the Western Gateway website shortly.

Overall, the pilot confirms that DRT has strong potential to support inclusive, low-carbon rural mobility, but scaling will depend on improving awareness, simplifying user experience, and building public confidence alongside service delivery.

2. Forest of Dean District Council – Low-Carbon Shared Mobility Club (Round 1)

A pilot introducing low-carbon car hire, e-bike hire, and shared transport in the Forest of Dean. A Mobility Hub in Coleford and an E-Bike Hire location, with findings helping shape a wider network of shared transport options.

This project has now successfully completed its initial phase, with key activities delivered and extensive learning captured in the final evaluation report. The pilot has established a first-in-area shared mobility offer and generated valuable insight into the requirements for delivering shared transport solutions in a rural context.

The pilot established a clear proof of concept through the launch of the district's first EV car club and progress on e-bike and mobility hub proposals, demonstrating that shared mobility

can work in rural areas. However, it confirmed that urban models are not directly transferable and require a more flexible, hybrid approach. While public engagement was strong, uptake was slower than anticipated, highlighting the time needed to achieve behavioural change and build demand.

Delivery was affected by operational challenges, including delays in EV infrastructure, procurement complexity, vehicle reliability issues, and rising insurance costs, impacting timelines and user confidence. The pilot highlighted the importance of integration, with the most effective approach combining car clubs, e-bikes, public transport and mobility hubs, alongside strong public sector leadership and anchor demand.

Overall, the pilot has delivered significant strategic learning and influenced wider transport planning, confirming the potential of shared mobility to support rural decarbonisation and accessibility. However, scaling will require a longer-term, integrated approach with continued investment, and an extended delivery period has already been approved by the district council. The full detail of the key findings is set out in the evaluation report, which will be published on the Western Gateway website shortly.

3. **Bridport Town Council – West Bay Weekend Shuttle Bus (Round 1)**

This pilot is about a low-cost, frequent weekend bus service between Bridport and West Bay to enhance community mobility and reduce car dependency. Running up to every 30 minutes, the service will improve access to local facilities, coastal attractions, and residential areas, supporting both residents and visitors.

This pilot has now been successfully completed, with all planned activities delivered and key lifecycle findings captured within the final evaluation report. The pilot demonstrated strong performance, clear demand, and measurable social, economic, and environmental benefits.

The service achieved over 6,600 passenger journeys with consistently high satisfaction and repeat usage, confirming a clear community need. It has been effective in reducing car dependency, removing over 2,200 car journeys and delivering emissions savings of around 15%. The shuttle also provided an accessible and inclusive transport option, particularly benefiting older residents, young people, and non-drivers, improving access to services, leisure, and employment.

A simple, low-cost, high-frequency, place-based model proved highly effective, supporting the local visitor and evening economy and encouraging increased local spend. The service was successfully adapted during the pilot in response to user feedback and seasonal demand, demonstrating a flexible and responsive approach.

However, awareness remains a key constraint, with a notable proportion of potential users still unaware of the service despite strong marketing activity, indicating further growth potential. Operational and funding challenges were also identified, including reliance on a single vehicle and driver, limited accessibility, and the need for longer-term funding to sustain and expand the service. As a result, the service has secured additional support from Bridport Town Council and Dorset Council to continue operating beyond the Western Gateway pilot period.

Overall, the pilot demonstrates a strong and replicable model for rural and coastal transport, showing that simple, affordable, and reliable shuttle services can play a significant role in improving accessibility and reducing car dependency, with further potential to scale through continued investment and increased awareness.

4. **Lyme Regis Town Council - Lyme Bay Night Link Shuttle Bus (Round 2)**

A shuttle bus on Friday and Saturday nights linking Lyme Regis and Bridport. Work is progressing with this pilot. The service was launched on May 1st with Mayors and press in attendance. The service was very busy with a lot of positive feedback so far. The first 3-4 initial

runs carried around 300 passengers. More details on this available on the Western Gateway [website](#).

5. **Gloucestershire County Council - Data driven visitor management in Bourton-on-the-Water (Round 2)**

A scheme combining real-time parking information with coach/tour operator collaboration to ease visitor pressure and improve sustainable access to the Cotswolds. Discussions on the procurement and installations plans of the parking cameras ongoing and will then develop a digital dashboard afterwards. Work is ongoing to achieve those.

6. **Dorset Council - South East Dorset Rural Mobility Pilot (Round 2)**

The development of an investable, implementation-ready pilot package which will test integrated rural mobility interventions in South East Dorset. This work is progressing with 2 workshops held which focused on establishing the evidence base, engaging stakeholders, and developing and refining pilot interventions and propositions. This pilot is due to come to an end soon with the final report being finalised.

3. **Call for Pilot – Round 3 – Recommendation II**

3.1 This was approved as part of the work plan at the last Partnership Board meeting, with a total of £50,000 allocated for this round of pilot funding. We will therefore conduct another call for pilot proposals, inviting organisations to submit applications, which will be assessed using the same methodology as the current pilots. Previous rounds were delivered jointly with Peninsula Transport. However, this round will be solely Western Gateway, as Peninsula Transport won't be funding any rural mobility pilot during this Financial Year.

3.2 A draft prospectus has been developed and updated to reflect a Western Gateway-only pilot programme and identifies six 'grand challenges' that are seen as the major barriers to achieving liveable rural communities. These challenges are shown below in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1 – Rural Mobility 'Grand Challenges'

3.2 The prospectus process identifies various pilot concepts which will provide applicants with practical examples of projects. These are detailed within the draft prospectus and will need to be reviewed and signed by the appointed Lead Member(s) prior to being distributed.

3.3 As in the first two rounds, we are seeking the appointment of Lead Member(s), with delegated authority from the Board, to oversee the 2026/27 call for pilot and to provide final approval on the selected pilots, reflecting the project's need for sustained engagement.

4. Request for approval – Recommendation III

4.1 Western Gateway request delegated authority from the Board to a Lead Member(s) for the Call for Pilot application process and assessment of applications received to award funding of £50k to successful bidders.

5. Equalities Implications

5.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups is expected. The Rural Mobility pilots have positive equality benefits by improving accessibility and enabling new journeys, particularly for older people, disabled people, young people and those without access to a private car. Improved connectivity can support greater independence, more inclusive access to employment, education, healthcare and social participation for a wide range of groups.

6. Legal Considerations

6.1 Western Gateway will provide funding to external organisations, including charities, community groups, private sector organisations, and local authorities. As such, we are required to undertake appropriate due diligence in selecting suitable recipients and to ensure that value for money is achieved.

6.2 We will seek oversight from the West of England Combined Authority, as our accountable body, and will work closely with the Grant Assurance Team, ensuring full compliance with all required processes and procedures to deliver this.

7. Financial considerations

7.1 Budget for this work element has already been approved as part of this year's work plan.

7.2 It is an ambition of this work that additional external funding may be secured for the delivery of pilot mobility projects in rural areas.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

8.1 Board members are asked to note this update and approve the recommendations set out at the beginning of this report

Contact Officer

Mena Abidakun, Project Manager, Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body