

South West Rural Mobility Strategy

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB)
Rural Mobility Pilot Prospectus (Round 3): 2026/27

Foreword

Through our work and engagement on the Southwest Rural Mobility Strategy, **Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB)** have identified a compelling case for a programme of rural mobility pilot projects to be delivered in the region.

We are very pleased to note the progress of the previous rounds of pilot projects who were successful in the funding rounds for last financial year and the current financial year (2024-2026), details of which can be found in this prospectus.

Through this prospectus, Western Gateway STB is making available up to £50,000 to support the third round of rural mobility pilot projects. This funding round is focused primarily on projects within the Western Gateway region. As such, funding is therefore available only to eligible pilot projects that are based within, or can demonstrate delivery within, the Western Gateway area. Where a proposal straddles the boundary with a neighbouring STB, however, it may be considered if the majority of the project's activity and impact falls within the Western Gateway area.



Our rural communities face long-term, critical challenges that significantly affect the sustainability of those communities and the economies they support. These challenges include:

- The operational sustainability of rural transport
- Meeting Net Zero targets
- Making rural mobility more equal and affordable for users
- Meeting local community needs and
- Making tourism-related mobility more sustainable.

These challenges are not currently being met by the existing rural mobility system. Our programme of pilot projects could help to unlock solutions, making rural communities more liveable for local residents and people who visit our countryside and coastal places. Our ambition is to deliver a programme of varied rural mobility pilot projects, which focus on finding solutions to these challenges.

We are happy to provide another round of funding support (round 3) to potential lead organisations to develop and deliver pilot projects through this 'call for pilots' application. We also encourage other partnerships to contribute match funding to support the delivery of a wider programme of rural mobility pilot projects that can deliver real and lasting change for our countryside and coastal areas.



Chris Willmore, Western Gateway Chair, said:

“Our region is home to many rural, coastal and market communities, with around a quarter of residents living in these areas. Good transport links are vital to ensuring people can access jobs, education, services and leisure opportunities, while supporting local businesses, strengthen rural economies and contribute to our wider environmental and sustainability goals. Through continued investment in rural mobility pilot projects, we can help improve connectivity, reduce transport barriers and create better access to employment, education, services and visitor destinations. The first two funding rounds have already demonstrated the value of targeted investment, from enhanced bus services, demand responsive transport, shared mobility initiatives to visitor travel management projects and the development of future transport solutions. As we launch this third round, we are seeking innovative and practical ideas that can improve rural mobility and accessibility. We welcome proposals that support the delivery of established pilot projects, encourage greater use of existing services, develop evidence and business cases for future investment, or test new approaches to addressing rural transport challenges. If you have a project that aligns with these objectives, we would be keen to hear from you and look forward to hearing your ideas.”



Our Offer

To summarise our proposal outlined in this prospectus:

- We are calling for partners across Western Gateway region to work with us to shape, fund and deliver a programme of rural mobility pilot projects.
- We are committing up to £50,000 to be awarded to new pilot projects this financial year (2026/27).
- We are seeking to award funding to pilot projects that explore new approaches to improving rural mobility by addressing at least one of six 'Grand Challenges' described in this prospectus.
- Funding will be awarded only to organisation(s) based within, or delivering projects within the Western Gateway area.
- Funding will support both the development of business and funding cases for future pilot schemes and the implementation of pilot projects that are sufficiently mature to progress to delivery. Examples of potential pilot concepts are included in this prospectus.

To apply for funding, organisations need to submit a completed application form (which can be found [here](#)) by **midnight Sunday, November 8th 2026**.

Introduction

Delivering rural mobility pilots in Western Gateway region

The **Southwest Rural Mobility Strategy** sets out a vision for the future of transport in the countryside and coastal areas of our region. The need to find better solutions to many of the challenges rural transport faces is vital. Western Gateway STB is therefore committing up to £50,000 this year to support the development and delivery of new pilot projects in the region.

Significant work is being undertaken across the UK to find solutions to rural transport issues and our region is playing its part. We are looking for lead organisations to develop project proposals and submit their plans to us. Funding will be allocated based on the robustness of the proposals and which propositions best fit our scope, are most innovative and could deliver the most learning. We are seeking to fund pilot project(s) that will improve mobility and accessibility within the Western Gateway area. An application proforma accompanies this prospectus.



Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB)

Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body is one of eight Sub-national Transport Bodies across the UK and one of two serving the Southwest of England, alongside Peninsula Transport. STBs are strategic partnerships funded by the Department for Transport and constituent local authorities. They bring together local authorities and key stakeholders to identify and address regional transport and infrastructure priorities, helping to support economic growth, improve connectivity and deliver benefits for local communities. Our partnership brings together Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council, Bristol City Council, Dorset Council, Gloucestershire County Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Wiltshire Council and the West of England Combined Authority to work collaboratively on strategic transport priorities across the region.

Over recent years, we have worked collaboratively with Peninsula Transport STB to develop the Southwest Rural Mobility Strategy, providing a shared vision and framework for improving connectivity across the region's rural and coastal communities.

Building on this foundation, the 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.

This funding round marks the next stage of that work and is being delivered solely by Western Gateway STB. **Funding is therefore available only to eligible pilot projects that are based within, or can demonstrate delivery within, the Western Gateway area. Where a proposal straddles the boundary with a neighbouring STB, however, it may be considered if the majority of the project's activity and impact falls within the Western Gateway area.**

This prospectus

The document presents a prospectus for the rural mobility pilot projects, describing how they will be taken forward, confirming what funding is presently available and making the case for further funding. We also set out how partners and stakeholders can become involved.

Following this introduction, this prospectus:

- Provides a summary of the rural mobility strategy, introduces the 'Liveable Rural Communities' concept.
- Identifies our six 'Grand Challenges' for rural mobility.
- Sets out our vision for a programme of pilot projects and define their scope.
- Provides details of the pilots that were successful in the previous funding round in 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- Considers the need for partnering and additional funding to deliver further pilot projects aiming for longevity.



Southwest Rural Mobility Strategy

Our **rural mobility strategy** sets out a vision for rural mobility across the combined Peninsula Transport and Western Gateway areas: the South West of England. While unified, the strategy recognises the differences between the two areas, both geographically and economically.

Our strategy strongly highlighted that the Southwest is a diverse area and home to a considerable range of types of countryside and coastal place. The region has rural areas located alongside major urban centres while also being home to some of the most remote locations in England. We have both inland rural areas and coastal communities, including those made less connected due to their proximity to estuaries, as well as island communities at the far end of long transport corridors. We also consider the different people within our rural communities, understanding their diverse needs and experiences of rural life, mobility, and accessibility.

The strategy identifies the key challenges faced by rural areas but also the major benefits that they provide locally, regionally, and nationally. This has been supported by an extensive evidence base and engagement with a range of stakeholders and representative groups of residents and organisations.

The strategy concluded with suggestions for a programme of rural mobility pilot projects to support the delivery of the rural mobility framework.

Piloting rural mobility in Southwest

Across the UK, including in the Southwest, new and innovative rural mobility solutions are already being delivered by local authorities, companies and communities, including through the pilot projects funding by the STBs in 2024 and 2025. However, more pilots are necessary:

- While many innovative solutions are being delivered in urban areas, many remain untested in rural conditions.
- Even where solutions have been assessed, many have yet to find delivery models that will be sustainable in the long term.
- Urban and rural places are very different, and it is imperative that we find solutions that meet the specific needs of rural communities, by taking a people and place-centric approach.

We aim to deliver pilot projects that will not focus on single solutions but bundles of potential solutions that work together with the existing mobility network to provide stronger support to communities.

The Southwest is also one of the most visited areas in the UK which places particular pressure on the rural mobility system, most markedly during the peak summer months. The challenges of tourist travel in rural areas need specific solutions, tailored to the local tourism market.

Overall, there is a significant capability and appetite in the Southwest to deliver further rural mobility pilot projects and the diversity of places and markets in which to run them and evaluate a multitude of rural use cases.



Liveable Rural Communities

Making our rural areas more liveable

To steer our proposed programme of pilots to be more ambitious, inclusive, cross-sectoral and collaborative, we have adopted the concept of “liveable rural communities” as the central focus. In doing so, we propose the following definition:

“Liveable rural communities are thriving, connected and sustainable networks of countryside and coastal settlements which, by working together, make sure residents and visitors can access their daily needs locally, affordably and reliably, whilst striving to achieve Net Zero.”



This definition captures all elements of the rural mobility framework promoted in our strategy and as such, in relation to the pilots, the liveable rural communities approach supports:

- Improved access for residents and visitors to their daily needs locally, within rural areas, both physically and digitally
- Providing local hubs of activity bringing together mobility with wider activities
- Supporting networks of communities working together to share resources and services
- Focusing on decarbonised, active, publicly-available and shared transport
- Promoting the sharing and electrifying of cars and vans
- Strengthening larger rural settlements as the drivers of sustainable rural development
- Improving intra-rural and strategic connectivity in rural areas
- Increasing the affordability of rural mobility for users
- Increasing the reliability and resilience of rural mobility
- Delivery through cross-sectoral partnerships and funding
- Facilitating visitors to travel by sustainable modes of transport while supporting the wider rural mobility network.

By using the liveable rural communities concept, we propose to not only consider how to improve the sustainability of transport services but to also widen the scope to consider solutions and innovations beyond transport. We want to understand if there are other ways of providing rural communities with access to their daily needs that don't always require longer journeys to larger towns and cities. In addition, we want the pilot projects to consider not just one single solution but a bundle of solutions, to evaluate whether they can provide more comprehensive packages of support for communities that can be more sustainable and self-supporting in the longer term.

The liveable rural communities concept has the people and places of the rural Southwest at its heart. Rural mobility must be shaped around the needs of rural communities and places. We expect all pilot projects, whether led by community organisations, local authorities or businesses, to put the people and places they serve at the centre of their propositions.



Rural Mobility Grand Challenges

Rural areas face a complex web of interlinked issues while at the same time providing considerable benefits to the wider region. Our countryside and coastal communities in the Southwest are home to 33% of the region's population, they provide wonderful places to live and are areas of valuable cultural heritage as well as breathtaking landscapes and rich natural environments.

Furthermore, in striving to overcome some of the critical threats we all face such as climate change, eco-system breakdown and food security, our countryside and coastal areas will have vital roles to play locally, regionally and nationally.

To define the key areas for action, we have set out six Grand Challenges for rural mobility. These are the major problems we have found through all our work, analysis and engagement, which, if resolved, could transform rural mobility and the communities and economies it supports.

Our six Grand Challenges for rural mobility are:



1. How can rural transport be made more operationally sustainable in the long term?

With fewer people, longer travel distances, high operational costs and constrained public sector funding, how can we make sure rural transport can be secured for the future?



2. How can the Net Zero challenge be met in rural areas?

Rural areas will play a key role in combating climate change and meeting Net Zero, but they face particular challenges in decarbonising mobility.



3. How can rural mobility be more equitable for residents and visitors?

Some people living within and visiting rural areas face particular mobility challenges including women, the ageing, the young and those living with disabilities but at present insufficient thought is given to their needs.



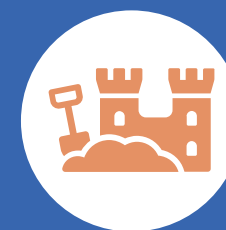
4. How can accessing daily needs be made more affordable for residents and visitors?

Rural residents spend a higher proportion of their income on transport compared to their urban counterparts and are therefore more likely to be living with fuel or transport poverty.



5. How can the needs of rural communities be met more locally?

Rural areas have seen a continuing decline in local services meaning that residents and visitors must travel longer distances to gain access to their everyday needs, leading to higher costs, increasing isolation and reducing opportunities.



6. How can tourism-related mobility become more sustainable?

Like many rural areas, tourism is vital to the Southwest economy but it also generates significant transport issues, particularly during the seasonal visitor peaks.

Pilot Programme Vision and Scope

The development and delivery of pilot projects will be aimed at overcoming the six Grand Challenges and testing different approaches to resolving them, meeting the needs of residents and visitors, and to make rural areas more liveable.

Through the rural mobility pilots, the STBs are aiming to:

- Deliver an innovative and varied programme of pilot projects which consider the six grand challenges, different geographies, different combinations of solutions and different partnerships.
- Develop and test new and innovative commercially, financially and operationally sustainable models for the delivery of mobility for rural areas.
- Engage communities and stakeholders in developing and running pilot projects and delivering the right local solutions.
- Provide best practice for the delivery of rural mobility, in collaboration with the public, private and third sectors.
- Undertake robust monitoring and evaluation of the pilot projects, understanding what impacts and benefits have been generated and why, and disseminate findings widely.

Pilot Programme Scope

Each pilot should be focused on delivering more 'liveable rural communities' and funding applications should consider:

 **The six Grand Challenges:** consider the grand challenges identified and the operational sustainability of rural mobility.

 **Users and activities:** consider the needs of users and the challenges they face. Pilot projects could support communities as a whole or focus on the specific needs of particular groups, such as tourists or people with disabilities or mobility impairments.

 **Geography:** consider a range of rural place types including variations of settlement size, remote and less remote locations, coastal or inland locations. And consider how mobility in rural areas is affected by administrative boundaries and may benefit from operating across those boundaries.

 **Interventions:** consider the delivery of bundles of interventions to improve rural mobility further, rather than a single intervention.

 **Forms of transport:** a focus on decarbonised, active, publicly available and shared forms of transport, and local journeys.

 **Carbon management:** consider the 'Avoid, Shift, Improve' approach to decarbonising mobility and consider how carbon can be reduced through each stage of the pilot process.

 **Delivery lead:** consider who should lead across the public, private and third sectors.

 **Partnering:** include partnerships across sectors both within and outside of transport – the scale of these partnerships will vary on the specific pilot. Pilot projects will also be expected to co-operate with other projects across the Southwest, and beyond.

 **Timescales:** The pilot projects should aim for a minimum of 12-months of steady state operation.

 **Funding:** Western Gateway is committing to providing up to £50,000 of funding in 2026 split across multiple projects, but organisations can also consider other match funding opportunities.

 **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Pilot projects will be required to undertake monitoring and evaluation and share learning and recommendations to other organisations across the region and further afield.

Potential Pilot Projects

With the funding currently available, we realise that pilot projects will be relatively modest, and they must also be relatively quick to deliver in terms of the interventions and the learning they could generate. The scope is therefore intended to encourage pilot proposals for new transport and complementary services and/or small-scale infrastructure that can be led by public, private or third-sector delivery models. However, with additional match funding and resources, the ambition of pilot projects could be greater.

The following provides a summary that could be considered as pilot projects.

**E-bike/e-cargo
bike sharing**

**E-bike Wheels for
Work**

**E-cargo bike
deliveries**

**Cycles on public
transport**

Ride sharing

**Taxi services and
ride-hailing**

Car clubs

**Community-
focused bus
services**

**Dynamic Demand
Responsive
Transport**

Shuttle buses

Rural hubs

**Mobility-as-a-
Service**

**Rural mobility
credit scheme**

**Consumer
Service
digitalisation**

**Passenger
on freight
transport**

**Local freight
consolidation**

Parcel lockers

Drone deliveries

EV charging

Previous Call for Pilots

We are pleased to see the progress made with the ten pilots who were successful in the previous rounds of funding in 2024/25 and 2025/26, and details can be found below. Please note we are looking for new innovative ideas for this round 3.

The Bodmin & Lanivet Rural Community Bus Scheme (2024/25) – Peninsula Transport

A pilot project to create a sustainable community-led transport network. Coordinating three community buses, it will deliver regular, reliable routes and hireable services to connect rural villages, local amenities and key services in the vicinity of Bodmin.

Bridport Town Council – West Bay Weekend Shuttle Bus (2024/25) – Western Gateway

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.

Forest of Dean District Council – Low-Carbon Shared Mobility Club (2024/25) – Western Gateway

Low-carbon car hire and shared transport in the Forest of Dean, including a mobility hub in Coleford and an E-Bike Hire location, with findings helping shape a wider network of shared transport options.

Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership – Enhancing Access to Rural Spaces (2024/25) – Western Gateway

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

The Gateway project, Torpoint (2025/26) – Peninsula Transport

The scheme aims to improve rural and cross ferry transport in the Tamar and Rame areas by building a clear picture of how people currently travel, working with communities to design better options, and testing small, targeted transport pilots that respond to real local needs.

One Ilfracombe Project (2025/26) – Peninsula Transport

Creating a shared, low-carbon transport solution that directly supports unemployed residents into sustainable jobs while trialling scalable models for rural mobility.

Intergenerational Volunteering (2025/26) – Peninsula Transport

The scheme aims to strengthen rural mobility in Devon by enhancing the sustainability of community car schemes. It will launch a county-wide volunteer recruitment campaign targeting under-65s, whilst also supporting older volunteers to address generational gaps in volunteering.

Data Driven Visitor Management in Cotswolds (2025/26) – Western Gateway

This scheme aims for the installation of smart parking sensors with a real-time dashboard and responsive traffic management, in collaboration with coach operators to develop sustainable travel itineraries and use predictive messaging to influence visitor behaviour.

Lyme Bay Night Link (2025/26) – Western Gateway

This scheme will pilot a community-supported night-time shuttle linking Bridport and Lyme Regis on Friday and Saturday evenings. It will test a long-term community subscription "Transport Commons" model for financial sustainability.

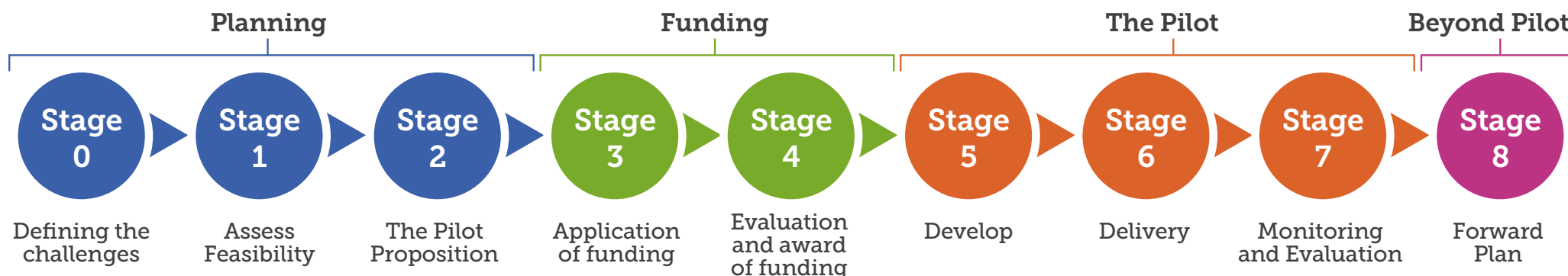
South East Dorset Rural Mobility Pilot (2025/26) – Western Gateway

This scheme seeks to develop an investable, implementation-ready pilot package which will test integrated rural mobility interventions in South East Dorset.

Pilot Route Map

Outlined below is a route map for developing and delivering a pilot project within this programme which sets out the key steps in the process from initial definition of the challenges to be resolved to what happens beyond the pilots.

While we propose to take a proportionate approach, we need to ensure that the pilot programme is based on robust understanding, analysis and planning to both ensure value for money and that pilot projects have the best possible opportunity to succeed.



Stage 0 defines the need for a pilot by identifying a key problem or opportunity within rural mobility that currently does not have a sustainable solution. This issue should be related to one or more of the six grand challenges and must consider operational sustainability of rural mobility.

Stage 1 assesses the initial feasibility of undertaking a pilot project through engaging with stakeholders, defining the geographic scope, defining the needs and challenges of the people affected, understanding current mobility in the area and the wider policy context, and considering learning from pilots that have similar focuses before.

Stage 2 develops a 'pilot proposition' to use as a basis for funding. A vision and objective should be set for the project to steer the selection of solutions to be piloted. The approach to governance and project roles and responsibilities will need to be developed. A programme and a plan for funding is formulated. Finally, the approach to monitoring and evaluation, proportionate to the scale of the project, is defined.

The pilot proposition and analysis will support an application of funding to Western Gateway in **Stage 3**. Applications will, however, need to demonstrate that they have considered each step through stages 0, 1 and 2. In **Stage 4**, we will evaluate the applications and award funding.

Once funding confirmed **Stage 5** will develop the pilots including, design, procurement and completing any statutory processes.

The launch and operation of the pilot projects is in **Stage 6**. We expect pilots to operate for a minimum of 12 months, but this could expand depending on the availability of additional funding.

While much of the learning from the projects will be gained from their operation, **Stage 7** may also run in the development stage to ensure lessons are learned from how the pilots are planned, procured and delivered. Dissemination of the learning is expected through all stages.

The final stage focuses on the plan beyond the pilot. **Stage 8** may begin before the conclusion of the operational part of the pilot project and involves setting the forward plan to continued operation, if the pilot has proved to be successful.

Submitting A Pilot Proposal

In the Southwest Rural Mobility Strategy, we have set the policy framework around which transport in our countryside and coastal areas can develop. However, we need partners across the region to make our vision become reality. Testing and trialling the potential solutions to our six grand challenges, through pilot projects, is the key next step and we cannot do this alone.

We are looking for partners to develop pilot propositions and submit applications to us for a share of the funding available. We are also looking to our partners to secure additional funding and resources to make our combined investment go further.

The funding available is £50,000. Therefore, the **maximum funding that can be sought from a single application is £50,000**. We reserve the right to award lower levels of funding than applied for where there are multiple strong applications.

A single application should be made for each pilot proposition by a single lead organisation. Each application will need to be accompanied by letters of support from partners and confirmation of other funding and resources being used to deliver the pilots.

The pilot projects will be expected to operate independently of Western Gateway, but a condition of the funding will be that we sit on the pilot project board and be kept updated throughout.

We are open to accepting applications from different sectors including local authorities, other public sector organisations, businesses and charities or community organisations. However, any lead partner will need to undergo financial due diligence checks before any grants can be awarded. These checks will be carried out and signed off by our accountable body; West of England Combined Authority. Lead organisations requesting a grant significantly higher than their annual turnover will be considered high risk and will not be eligible for funding. There is no guarantee of long term funding beyond this pilot phase through 2026/27.

The closing date for applications is midnight Sunday, November 8th 2026.

Applications, supporting information any questions regarding this process should be sent to westerngatewaystb@westofengland-ca.gov.uk



Western Gateway

Sub-national Transport Body



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