

Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body

Board Meeting

Paper B

Date **30th September 2026**

Title of report: **Strategic Investment Plan – Early Business Case funding**

Purpose of report: **To present a list of schemes for potential early business case development funding.**

Recommendations:

The members of the Board are recommended to:

- I. Approve schemes for early business case development funding as set out in Table Two.
- II. Approve provision of a letter of support to the Department for Transport and Network Rail to provide funding for the Hamworthy Freight Line - Port of Poole expansion.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Western Gateway's Strategic Transport Plan (STP) was approved in March 2024 and the associated Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) in March 2025. Members agreed that both documents would be reviewed and, if necessary, revised following a) the identification of sites for new (enhanced) housing growth and b) the publication of the Integrated National Transport Strategy (now Better Connected).
- 1.2 At Board on 25th February 2026, it was agreed to undertake a light touch review of the SIP resulting in the production of a 'top 50' list of schemes, which can be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 As a result of the 24th June 2026 Board being cancelled approval in writing was provided by the Board to bring to the September 2026 Board a potential list of schemes from the SIP for early business case development funding.
- 1.4 Following the review of the SIP officers will shortly commence a light touch review of the Strategic Transport Plan with a view to bringing the revised document to the Board in March 2027.

2. Scheme shortlisting

- 2.1 Officers proceeded to review the 'top 50' list to reassess the schemes against the key themes of the STP, the deliverability and estimated costs compared to the available budget. From the original list the 'top 26' schemes were selected to progress to the next level of shortlisting.
- 2.2 A questionnaire per scheme was sent out to bidders requesting further information to assess the feasibility of providing early business case funding. Following the return of the questionnaires, officers reviewed responses in numerical order and assessed each bid to ascertain the impact of the funding, potential consequences for the scheme if funding wasn't received, and for confirmation that the scheme could be delivered before the end of March 2027.
- 2.3 The final list of shortlisted schemes as shown in Table One below were taken to the SIP Advisory Group on 4th September 2026 for peer review and endorsement to take forward to Board.
- 2.4 The list includes a scheme requested by Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council (BCP) and depending on the outcome of the protocol for temporary non-payment of annual contribution by Local Authorities (see Item 5, Paper A) this scheme may not be funded in 2026/27.
- 2.5 The Board in writing following the cancellation of the 24th June 2026 Board meeting approved separately an allocation of up to £30,000 to take forward the sixth scheme on the list – Westbury Station additional platform, funding for an economic appraisal for the reinstatement of Platform 0 and the associated train service improvements it enables.
- 2.6 The STB were advised by BCP that the fifteenth scheme on the list – Hamworthy Freight Line - Port of Poole expansion, no longer requires early business case funding as the scheme is now construction ready. BCP have asked instead that the STB provides a letter of support to the Department for Transport and Network Rail to provide funding to complete the project as detailed in Appendix 2

Table One – Final list of schemes shortlisted for funding in 2026/27

Scheme name	Purpose of funding	Bid received from	Cost	Match funding available
Improvement of gateline capacity and customer facilities at Bournemouth station	Develop scheme to the next design stage	South Western Rail	£30,000	£15,000
Long distance coach connections (cross-boundary	Feasibility study for a cross-boundary long-distance coach		£25,000	£2,500

coach links): Lydney-Chepstow- Bristol / Cheltenham- Bristol	connection between the market towns in the Forest of Dean via Chepstow to Bristol	Gloucestershire County Council		
Package of improvements to deliver strategic sustainable travel network connecting South East Dorset to the BCP conurbation	Progress further design work on schemes to tackle critical junctions	Dorset Council	£30,000	£30,000
South East Dorset Rural Mobility Pilot	Move the project from proposition development to implementation readiness	Dorset Council	£30,000	£45,000
Heart of Wessex Line Service enhancement	Economic analysis to provide a case for an hourly service	Network Rail	£10,000	£0
Melksham Loop (Thingley Junction)	Undertake economic appraisal, early design and development work.	Wiltshire Council	£30,000	£20,000
Gloucester Rail Station	Progress feasibility work to deliver infrastructure capacity enhancements including Horton Road level-crossing	Gloucestershire County Council	£22,500	£2,250
A338 Harnham Gyratory to Downton Safety Improvements	To fund early contractor involvement to develop the scheme for delivery	Wiltshire Council	£25,000	£7,000
A350/A303 Two Mile Down Junction Improvements	To carry out strategic & safety modelling & stakeholder engagement	Wiltshire Council	£18,000	£7,000
A338 to Wessex Fields Sustainable Access Package	Undertake design work for new bridge link over River Stour to inform active travel package option	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council	£25,000	£152,000
Salisbury Rail Service Enhancements	Fund a feasibility study to define requirements needed to bring Platform 1	Network Rail	£30,000	£0

	back into passenger use			
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3. Schemes proposed for early business case funding

- 3.1 The Western Gateway Work Plan has allocated £180,000 for early business case development of schemes in 2026/27. To fund all schemes listed in the Table One a total of £275,500 would be required. Therefore, it is recommended to Board that the schemes in Table Two are funded at a total cost of £177,500.

Table two – Proposed list of SIP schemes for funding in 2026/27

Scheme name
Improvement of gateline capacity and customer facilities at Bournemouth station
Long distance coach connections (cross-boundary coach links): Lydney-Chepstow-Bristol / Cheltenham-Bristol
Package of improvements to deliver strategic sustainable travel network connecting South East Dorset to the BCP conurbation.
South East Dorset Rural Mobility Pilot
Heart of Wessex Line Service enhancement
Melksham Loop (Thingley Junction)
Gloucester Rail Station

- 3.2 Following the decision in September 2026 by Bath & North East Somerset Council (B&NES) not to provide its £24,000 contribution for 2026/27, the Western Gateway's budget has been reduced accordingly (see Item 9, Paper E). This reduces the budget available for early business case development funding by £24,000, which is equivalent to one scheme. As a result, there is currently a risk that the last scheme listed in Table Two, Gloucester Rail Station, may not be able to receive funding. However, with one other project currently forecast to come in under budget, alongside the potential to draw on the contingency pot, it is possible we will be able to fund this scheme. It is, therefore, retained in the recommended list for 2026/27 at this stage.

4. Schemes not selected for early business case development funding

- 4.1 Table three details the schemes that the STB are not proposing to fund in 2026/27. Reasons for the decision not to fund schemes include development work is already in progress or would be undertaken without a contribution from the STB, the STB contribution is very small, there is a change of scope, or the scheme is deferred to 2027/28 funding period as it is dependent on the completion of other studies.

Table three – Proposed list of SIP schemes not funded

Scheme name	Purpose of funding	Cost	Reason for not proposing to fund
Bristol - Oxford direct train service	To contribute to the level crossing mitigations that are required before the 2-hourly service	£30,000	Only 2% of funding would come from Western Gateway not great enough

	can be improved to an hourly service		to stop the scheme proceeding
Superbus Service Enhancements	To produce a marketing strategy for the scheme and materials to promote Superbus served towns, destinations and visitor attractions	£30,000	SIP funding not appropriate for publicity materials
Accessibility improvements to rail stations in WEMCA	Ongoing work to enhance station accessibility by commissioning a feasibility study to look at opportunities to enhance bus-rail interchange at an agreed list of local stations	£30,000	Scheme is already being brought forward and there is a change of scope
Wilton Rail Station	Assess network capacity for additional station including transport modelling and economic analysis, draft Strategic Outline Business Case & consultation	£30,000	Pending further discussion between South Western Railway & Wiltshire Council
Bournemouth Airport and Aviation Business Park Sustainable Access Package	Undertake long list scheme development and sifting based on scheme objectives identified in the LTP	£30,000	Western Gateway funding would not considerably advance scheme progress beyond current timeframe
B3097 (Station Road) Bridge Improvements	Strategic modelling of revised HGV flow, determination of revised weight limits across the network, network auditing, traffic Calming/Active Travel scheme development, Mane Way bridge sensitivity testing,	£15,000	Scheme to be reviewed for 2027/28 funding as reliant on being awarded DfT Structures funding

	bus route re-evaluation		
Strategic Interchange Hubs (Gloucester, Cheltenham & Ashchurch for Tewkesbury Rail Stations)	Further work to identify to identify improvements to Ashchurch for Tewkesbury station	£20,000	Scheme to be reviewed for 2027/28 as other sources of funding available
A354 multimodal corridor improvements south of Dorchester to Weymouth and Portland	Undertake a feasibility study on schemes within the corridor, including preparatory surveys and design work. Develop an outline business case for emerging schemes from feasibility study	£30,000	Scheme to be reviewed for 2027/28 funding
Regeneration and rebuilding of Poole station	To progress outline feasibility plans for the regeneration of the railway land around Poole station	£30,000	Scheme to be reviewed for 2027/28 funding, dependent on Poole Station Strategic Study
All BCP rail stations to be made fully accessible	To develop outline business case for accessibility improvements at stations	£25,000	Scheme to be reviewed for 2027/28 funding
Yeovil to Salisbury Service Improvement (Tisbury Loop)	To identify the infrastructure upgrades required to support higher line speeds between Yeovil and Salisbury	£25,000	Scheme to be reviewed for 2027/28 funding, dependent on West of England Line Modernisation Plan

Recommendation

To allocate £177,500 to the schemes detailed in table two for early business case development

5. Consultation, communication and engagement

- 5.1 The scheme list was shared with the SIP Advisory Group on 4 September 2026. The Chair has been kept up to date with progress and her views sought.

6. Equalities Implications

- 6.1 No adverse impact on any protected groups. The schemes on the Strategic Investment Plan list will improve connectivity, enable new opportunities to travel and greater accessibility to key destinations and services.

7. Legal considerations

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

8. Financial considerations

- 8.1 The Western Gateway Work Plan for 2026/27, agreed at the Board on 25 February 2026 to allocate £341,000 for projects and early business case development. With funding already allocated to various projects including Round 3 of the Rural Mobility Pilots and Westbury Platform 0, not all of the budget is available for early business case development. In total, £180,000 is on hand for 2026/27. The withdrawal of B&NES contribution for 2026/27 reduces this by £24,000 although we anticipate that savings and the use of some contingency may enable us to restore the budget to £180,000. For 2027/28, £278,000 is programmed for projects and early business case development so there is the opportunity for schemes not funded in 2026/27 to be picked up next year.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

- 9.1 The Board is asked to approve the recommendations set out at the beginning of this report.

Contact Officer

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Appendix One: Top 50 SIP schemes

Project name	Description	Bid received from
Improvement of gateline capacity and customer facilities at Bournemouth station	Series of improvements to downside and upside station facilities to improve capacity and safety and significantly enhance the customer experience at the station	Network Rail / South Western Railway
Long distance coach connections (cross-boundary coach links): Lydney-Chepstow-Bristol / Cheltenham-Bristol	Chepstow Transport Strategy identifies a package of public transport scheme priorities which includes the Chepstow - Lydney corridor.	Gloucestershire County Council
Package of improvements to deliver strategic sustainable travel network connecting South East Dorset to the BCP conurbation.	Delivery of a strategic cross boundary sustainable travel network including active travel routes and bus corridor improvements	Dorset Council
South East Dorset Rural Mobility Pilot	The pilot responds to the South West Rural Mobility Strategy, seeking to provide better transport connections between towns and villages, combat isolation and poor physical and mental health, provide choice in the ways people travel and encourage more sustainable travel choices.	Dorset Council
Heart of Wessex Line Service enhancement	Delivery of 1 Train Per hour train service (skip-stop Chetnole and Thornford) along the Heart of Wessex Line, through the delivery of a new passing loop between Castle Cary and Yeovil Pen Mill.	Network Rail
Westbury station additional platform	A fourth platform at Westbury station would create capacity for additional train services. Westbury is an important hub in its own right but in particular has a major interchange function.	Network Rail
Bristol - Oxford direct train service	Introduction of an hourly direct train service between Bristol and Oxford	Network Rail
Superbus Service Enhancements	Core interurban bus corridor routes with minimum hourly frequency and an enhanced peak	Wiltshire Council
Dorset Metro Shuttle (Wareham to Brockenhurst)	Additional 1tph shuttle service between Wareham and Brockenhurst, through the delivery of reduced signalling	Network Rail

	headways and junction margins, including potential closure of Poole LX.	
Melksham Loop (Thingley Junction)	A new loop along the Melksham single rail line to provide additional capacity on a significantly constrained corridor.	Wiltshire Council
Accessibility improvements to rail stations in WEMCA	Improvements to local railway stations across the West of England to provide improvements to step-free access (such as lifts or ramps) and to improve station facilities for passengers.	West of England Combined Authority
Gloucester Rail Station	Capacity upgrades at Gloucester Station are necessary for the region so the rail network can accommodate proposed future growth in passenger services	Gloucestershire County Council
A338 Harnham Gyratory to Downton Safety Improvements	A338 identified as a crucial link supporting the M4 to Dorset Strategic Study. Works to further enhance operational capacity and safety of Harnham Gyratory and safety enhancements to the A338 between Salisbury and Downton.	Wiltshire Council
Salisbury Rail Service Enhancements	Enhancements to signalling within the Salisbury area to increase capacity and resilience for services in the area. Initial proposals include reduction in signalling headways and reinstatement of Platform 1	Network Rail - Strategic Planning
Port of Poole Expansion, reopening of Hamworthy Branch Line and supporting access improvements	To facilitate goods movements to/from the port of Poole by rail and to support expansion.	BCP Council
Bournemouth Airport and Aviation Business Park Sustainable Access Package	Package of sustainable access and connectivity improvements linking the A338 to Aviation Business Park and Bournemouth Airport to provide enhanced transport options, access and connectivity to support employment growth and international travel.	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
B3097 (Station Road) Bridge Improvements	Strategic modelling of revised HGV flow, determination of revised weight limits across the network, network auditing, traffic Calming/Active Travel scheme development, Mane Way bridge sensitivity testing, bus route re-evaluation	Wiltshire Council

A350/A303 Two Mile Down Junction Improvements	Improvement of the existing A303 / A350 grade separated single carriageway junction	Wiltshire Council
Strategic Interchange Hubs (Gloucester, Cheltenham & Ashchurch for Tewkesbury Rail Stations)	Strategic Interchange Hubs for onward multi-modal connectivity to the region by rail.	Gloucestershire County Council
A338 to Wessex Fields Sustainable Access Package	Package of sustainable access and connectivity improvements linking the A338 to key employment sites at Wessex Fields	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
Rail service frequency enhancements to existing rail services in WEMCA	Improvements to rail services across the rail network to increase the number of trains serving local railway stations across the West of England	West of England Combined Authority
Regeneration and rebuilding of Poole station	Replacement of current temporary station building which is in poor condition and rebuilding with an improved forecourt and car parking capacity to integrate with future regeneration of surrounding area and supported significant housing growth.	Network Rail / South Western Railway
All BCP rail stations to be made fully accessible	To make all railway stations located within BCP fully accessible to published standards	BCP Council
Wilton Rail Station	The Wilton Parkway rail station project aims to build a new four-platform railway station near Wilton's park and ride site, providing crucial transport links between the TransWilts line and the West of England line	Wiltshire Council
Yeovil to Salisbury Service Improvement (Tisbury Loop)	Improvement of services between Yeovil Junction and Salisbury along the West of England Line.	Network Rail/Wiltshire Council
A354 multi-modal corridor improvements south of Dorchester to Weymouth and Portland.	A package of enhancements to improve travel between Dorchester, Weymouth and Portland	Dorset Council
Gloucester station layout improvements	This scheme involves track and signalling works to deliver an optimised track layout which would improve performance and resilience by adding flexibility as well as unlocking capacity for additional local and freight services	Network Rail

Cheltenham Spa Station and cycle access link to Gloucestershire Cycle Spine.	Cheltenham Spa Station & cycle access link to Gloucestershire Cycle Spine	Gloucestershire County Council
Moreton in Marsh Railway Station Regional Hub	A project to enhance the Moreton in Marsh station forecourt, improve bus access and alleviate capacity on the A429 Fosse Way corridor	Gloucestershire County Council
Potential small scheme: A35 Dorchester Roundabouts	Proposed package of small-scale improvements to tackle congestion	National Highways
Cirencester to Kemble Railway Station - cycle access improvements	Cross border growth in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, which is also seeing significant future growth within proximity to Gloucestershire's border, may put additional pressure upon the local highway network, however, there is potential for improved local and cross border public transport, via bus and/or rail from Cirencester and Kemble. Kemble station now has an hourly service to London an addition to an hourly service to London, changing at Swindon.	Gloucestershire County Council
A30/A338 North of Salisbury Safety Improvements	A30/A338 improvements identified as a crucial complimentary objective to support the M4 to Dorset Strategic Study. Works to further enhance operational capacity and pedestrian/cyclist access and safety between Salisbury and Porton.	Wiltshire Council
Poole Travel Interchange	Creation of a new Poole Travel Interchange to better integrate and connect the rail and bus stations in the town	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
M4 Junction 17 Improvements	Junction 17 improvements to accommodate current and forecast traffic conditions, the logistics related development, but also to ensure that National Planning Policy Framework advocated levels of housing and employment growth can be accommodated along the A350 corridor and to the north along the A429.	Wiltshire Council
Bristol Temple Meads Capacity hub improvements as part of Bristol Temple Quarter	Improvements to Bristol Temple Meads station, as well as capacity improvements, improved interchange opportunities and improvements to passenger experience and overcrowding.	West of England Combined Authority

Bournemouth Town Centre sustainable access package	Providing mobility hubs, traffic measures, new pedestrian/crossings, high-quality cycle facilities and re-configured roundabouts to encourage walking, cycling and public transport movements from the station to town centre/sea front, supporting a range of journeys	BCP Council
South Wales Metro services between Cardiff and Bristol	Transport for Wales services between Cardiff Central and Bristol Temple Meads as part of the South Wales Metro	West of England Combined Authority
Christchurch Town Centre sustainable access package	The scheme will provide sustainable access to Christchurch town centre (regional destination) by prioritising space for walking, cycling and public transport to create modal shift	BCP Council
Potential small scheme: A36 Salisbury (Southampton Road Roundabouts)	Proposed package of small-scale improvements, which tackle congestion, improve safety and active travel provision	National Highways
Mass Rapid Transit & Strategic Interchange (Gloucester / Cheltenham)	Bus-based Mass Rapid Transit will provide a high quality and fast public transport connection through the urban areas of Gloucester and Cheltenham	Gloucestershire County Council
A37 package of improvements to improve safety and resilience between Dorchester and Yeovil onward connection to the M5	Highways improvements on A37 at Stratton Railway Bridge, north-west of Dorchester, to reduce impacts of frequent and serious flooding events on highway network.	Dorset Council
Poole Town Centre sustainable access package	A package of sustainable access and connectivity improvements to improve access in Poole Town Centre	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
Westerleigh rail Junction upgrade	Westerleigh Junction, near Bristol Parkway, is a significant rail bottleneck for services through the area from all points of the compass. Upgrading the junction, for example by providing grade separation, would help free up capacity for additional services which could include services between Gloucester and Bristol and for additional freight trains, as well as helping make train services more reliable.	Network Rail
(West of England) Mass Transit	Development of a mass transit system serving the Bristol and West of England area	West of England Combined Authority

Bristol Temple Meads Platform 0	Building a new platform adjacent to Platform 1 at Bristol Temple Meads would support additional local and regional services	Network Rail
A31 Capacity and safety improvements package	Capacity and safety improvements for vehicular traffic and walking and cycling and public transport at strategic junctions and sections along A31 to support the delivery of housing growth. Includes junction improvements and improved cycling, walking and public transport provision.	BCP Council
Corsham Rail Station	The station would aim to provide accessibility to high tech employment centres, Ministry of Defence employment industries, opportunities for growth and sustainable connectivity to local communities and enhanced access to Bath, Bristol, Chippenham, Oxford and London	Wiltshire Council
BCP Mass Transit	Delivery of a light rail/ultra light rail system across the BCP conurbation to support the delivery of housing and employment growth and improve cross conurbation travel.	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
Ashchurch for Tewkesbury Station & active travel corridor	Ashchurch for Tewkesbury Station rail infrastructure capacity enhancements and station access improvements	Gloucestershire County Council
A38 Major Road Network (MRN) scheme package	Capacity improvements, bus prioritisation and active travel provision at key locations along route. Improved access to Bristol Airport and route journey time reliability.	North Somerset Council
Bus corridor package in Bristol	A series of improvement along key bus routes within and radiating out from Bristol city centre across the wider urban area to improve opportunities and unlock bottlenecks for bus, walking and cycling	West of England Combined Authority
Melksham Bypass	Melksham bypass the current route through Melksham generates significant levels of severance between the town centre, the railway station and convenience food shopping etc., thereby suppressing rail mode share and promoting car usage contrary to local, regional and national policy	Wiltshire Council

Bus service frequency and rural bus service improvements - WEMCA	Improvements to bus services within both urban and rural areas by adding additional bus routes and increasing bus service frequencies across the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority area	West of England Combined Authority
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Appendix Two: Hamworthy Freight Line - Port of Poole expansion

Heidi Alexander MP

Secretary of State for Transport

Department for Transport

Great Minster House

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London

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United Kingdom

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Hamworthy Freight Line, Port of Poole

As chair of the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body I was delighted to see your recent announcement regarding the addition of a new target to achieve at least a 40% increase in freight moved by rail in net tonne kilometres by 2040.

Within our region we have a number of opportunities to support you in achieving this target. The Hamworthy Branch Line, serving the Port of Poole is a very live opportunity to reopen rail freight operations to a key international gateway.

By reopening the existing branch line a greater proportion of freight traffic would be transferred from road to rail. The scheme would support the transfer of 70,000 tonnes of aggregates per annum via rail, with a longer-term potential to reduce an additional 50,000 tonnes currently transported by road.

This would reduce the number of HGV movements on the SRN, including the A35, A31, and local roads serving the South East Dorset conurbation. This is expected to replicate the success of the Newhaven Marine Scheme (reopened in 2020) and have a positive impact on congestion whilst improving journey time reliability and improving road safety on a congested part of the network.

Network Rail's business case for the scheme identified a positive Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) and found that the scheme represented very high value for money.

Locally, partners have been working hard to progress the scheme. Poole Harbour Commissioners, as owners of the Port, have secured interest from a number of potential users of the scheme, including the Ministry of Defence and commercial operators specialising in bulk cargo and aggregates. Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council are working closely with the Port to explore further potential commercial opportunities and Network Rail have already invested in and completed the works to the mainline track to enable the connection.

The recent withdrawal, however, of the Brittany Ferries service from Poole to France means that the Port is now facing financial challenges and the £1.5m needed to complete the reinstatement works are, regrettably, not available locally.

The Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body identified the Hamworthy Branch Line as a regional priority through our Strategic Transport Plan, and it is a highly ranked scheme in our recently refreshed Strategic Investment Plan.

We recognise the significant opportunity this presents locally and regionally, but also the contribution it could make to achieving the government's new target. We welcome any support which could be provided to finally deliver this shovel-ready scheme.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Chris Willmore

Chair of Western Gateway STB