



# WESTERN GATEWAY RAIL STRATEGY

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## Stakeholder eConsultation

### INTRODUCTION

The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body (STB) covers a large, diverse geography and contains some of the UK's fastest-growing sectors in a variety of locations. Given the STB's economic potential, it is crucial that its strategic transport corridors are able to provide the best levels of connectivity possible.

The purpose of the STB is to produce a Strategic Transport Plan which will:

- Be a multi-modal strategy that considers Sub-national connectivity only;
- Identify issues and infrastructure requirements
- Complement local transport strategies to enable the delivery of shared objectives; and
- Focus on the strategic travel corridors through a series of Multi-Modal corridor studies.

The next step in the process involved a focus on rail and its role in the Western Gateway geography to develop a Rail Strategy. As part of the initial stage of this process, we are consulting key stakeholders and community groups in order to capture their views and priorities to support the development of Conditional Outputs for the Strategy.

This eConsultation contains **four** sections and should take **10-15** minutes to complete:

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In this section we would like you to think about the key impacts that this Rail Strategy should aim to achieve, and this will support the development of our Vision and Objectives. At the bottom, there is an open field for you to compose a response capturing your views and aspirations for rail in the region.

- this introduction section;
- comments on **Vision and Objectives**;
- a **SWOT** analysis of rail in the region; and
- an opportunity to provide **any other comments**.

The deadline to submit this eConsultation is **31 December 2019**.

1 Please enter your full name

Tony Smale

2 Which organisation do you represent?

Railfuture

3 What is your role or title in your organisation?

Wessex branch secretary

4 Please enter your email address if you would like to be kept up to date about the outcomes of this eConsultation and the Rail Strategy development.

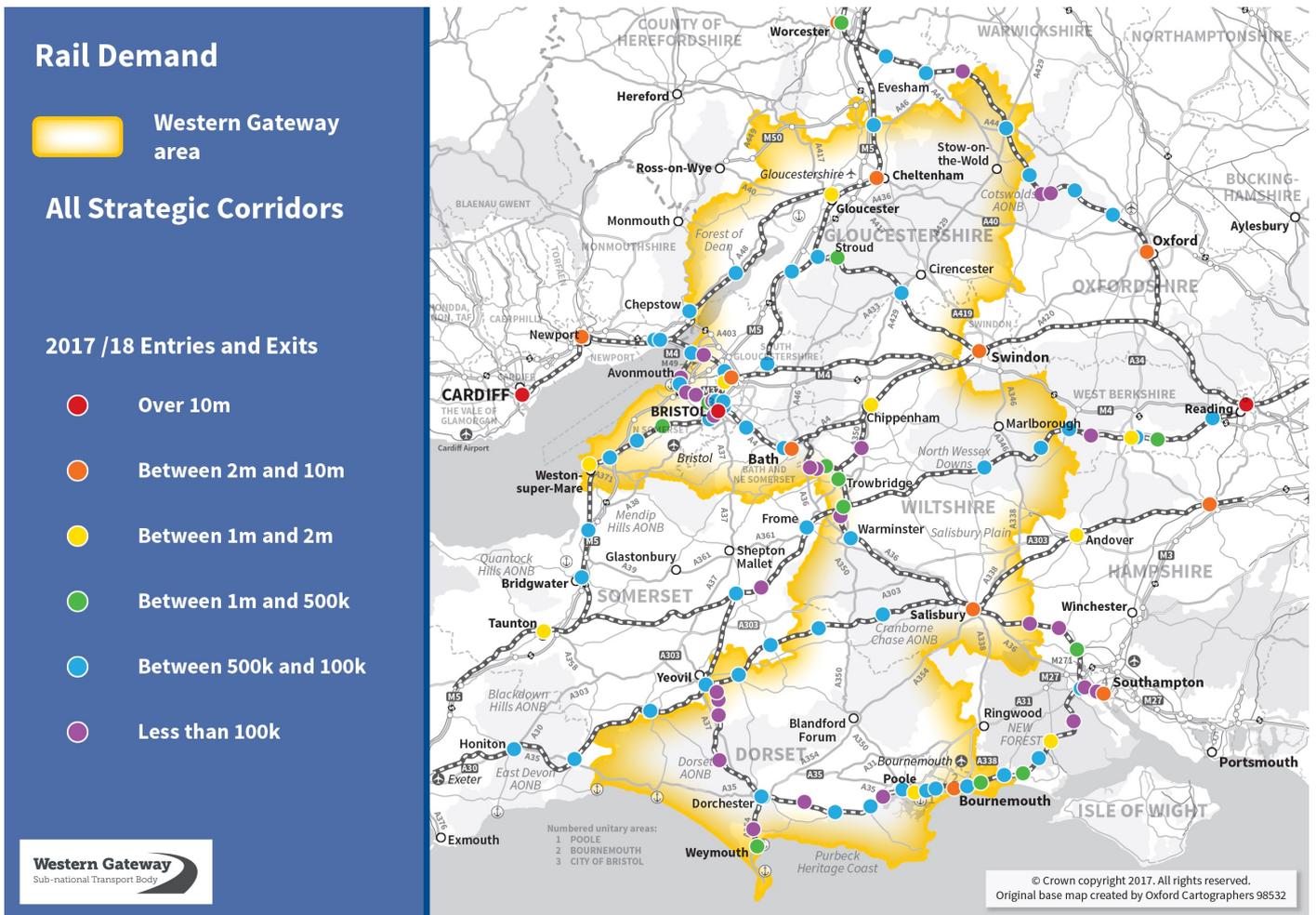
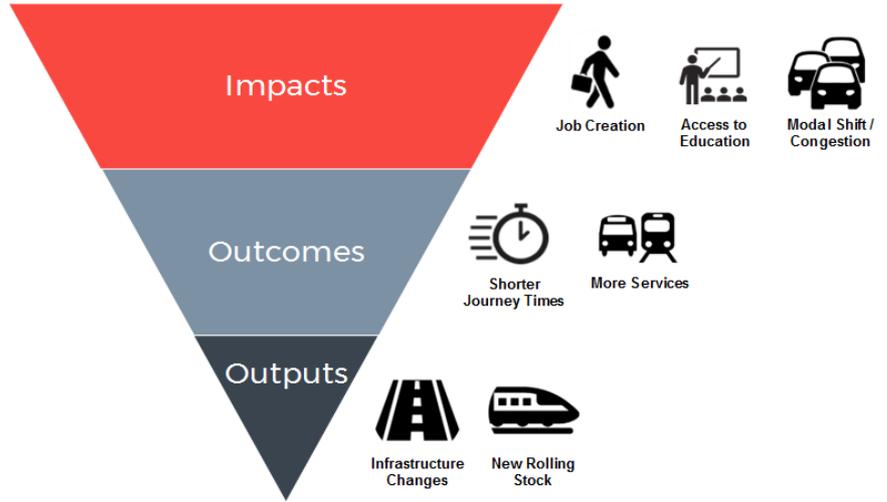
wessex@railfuture.org.uk

GDPR statement: by providing your personal data you are consenting to be contacted by either the Western Gateway Steering Group, consisting of the nine local authorities listed above, or the consultants WSP who are leading the engagement and Rail Strategy development. Your information will never be passed on to a third party and will be deleted after the completion of the Rail Strategy.



For this response, we would like you to focus on the high-level **impacts** and how society will benefit to an improved rail service provision, rather than a discussion of specific outputs that might be made to achieve this.

We would like you to consider not only journeys within the Western Gateway area but also (and crucially) cross-border connectivity to neighbouring regions. The main passenger rail lines are indicated in the image below.





## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 5 What high level impacts would you or your organisation like to see incorporated and addressed as part of this Rail Strategy?

The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body has the stated aims of driving innovation, maximising economic growth and improving industrial productivity. Its growth agenda envisages 300,000 new homes and over 190,000 new jobs. For this level of development to be sustainable, it follows that sustainable modes of transport such as rail should be favoured above those which exacerbate pollution, climate change and congestion.

The Transport Strategy should set a target of net zero growth of road traffic volumes and journey times, and set out what is required of the rail network's capacity and connectivity across and around the Western Gateway in order to achieve it. The Strategy should therefore aim to develop the rail network sufficiently to accommodate a combination of travel demand growth arising from increased population and economic activity, and modal shift to rail from existing road users.

Rail development leads to enhanced economic activity and increased land value; it can also unlock sites for housing or commercial development.

In our opinion, there is scope to double rail travel so that there is only minimal increase in road travel. For example, rail should be the first choice for longer-distance commuting and for inter-regional journeys.

New journey opportunities are possible through modest investment in rail services and infrastructure. On some corridors it may appear that rail has little to offer – here, innovative solutions such as dedicated rail-link bus services with through ticketing should be considered.

A modal shift to rail will ease road congestion and pollution; it will also decrease pressure for airport expansion. To achieve modal shift, the SNTB should aim to make public transport more attractive through measures such as smart-card ticketing, improved information for passengers and better bus-rail integration. Rail travel needs to be more affordable and accessible so that people on lower incomes and those with disabilities are not excluded. A greater role for rail freight transportation should also form part of the strategy.

## CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



In this section we would like you to think about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats regarding the Rail network in the Western Gateway.

**6** What do you think are the **strengths** of the rail network in the Western Gateway today?

Rail has the ability to move large numbers of passengers and heroic quantities of freight – there is far less land take than roads with equivalent capacity.

Rail is more environmentally friendly than road, and has the potential to become zero carbon through further electrification.

Rail transport lends itself to further automation and near-total safety. By contrast, the prospect of go-anywhere, autonomous road vehicles is a pipedream – in any case, autonomous vehicles would still create congestion and reinforce inactive lifestyles.

Railway route miles are roughly equal to highway route miles (motorways plus trunk roads). Furthermore, rail routes penetrate into town and city centres whereas highways usually bypass them.

Rail travel gives the opportunity to work, study or relax on the move.

**7** What do you think are the **weaknesses** of the rail network in the Western Gateway today?

Investment in infrastructure in the study area has been low compared to other regions.

Current cost:benefit analysis tools fail to capture the environmental and social benefits of rail.

Rail travel is perceived as poor value for money, and the fares system over-complicated.

Certain population centres and freight hubs have lost their rail connection; some growth areas (eg Cirencester) are no longer rail connected.

North-south rail services are generally slow and infrequent within the study area. There is poor connectivity between the South Coast and the South West.

The study area has many down-at-heel station environments with poor accessibility and insufficient facilities. An ageing population underlines the need to improve accessibility and facilities such as toilets.

For good door-to-door connectivity, rail passengers often rely on connecting bus services, but in rural areas these bus services are now infrequent or have been withdrawn altogether.



In this section we would like you to think about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats regarding the Rail network in the Western Gateway.

**8** What **opportunities** do you think there are for rail in the Western Gateway?

Most rail routes in the study area have spare capacity for growth – therefore there's the potential to ease road congestion and divert more of the region's mineral, aggregates and container traffic to rail. In the study area, rail's modal share is currently low, so there are quick wins to be had!

Proximity to an existing or new station can unlock land for housing, leisure and commercial development. New industrial developments should, if possible, be located where they can be served by rail. Stations could be re-imagined as community hubs leading to enhanced commercial activity and improved urban environments. Rail development is popular with the public whereas road development is usually resisted. Disused railway trackbeds could be brought back into use with relative ease.

Although just outside the study area, the new station at Worcestershire Parkway will improve connectivity between Cotswold Line stations and those on the Cardiff-Nottingham route. There are opportunities for similar schemes elsewhere to transform connectivity between rail routes, such as track remodelling at Yeovil Junction so that Heart of Wessex services can call.

Four-tracking of certain sections would enable local stations (existing or reopened) to enjoy a frequent service on busy inter-regional routes such as the GW main line.

Heritage lines in the study area (Swanage Railway, Dean Forest Railway etc) have the potential for reintroduction of regular passenger services.

Public demand for action on climate change and a greater awareness of the environmental cost of road and air transport give rail the "green" advantage.

Completion of electrification to Cardiff will release a skilled workforce and their specialist equipment for a rolling programme of electrification, starting in the Bristol area then onward to Exeter and Plymouth.

Usage of all stations in the Greater Bristol area has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. The rail network has great potential to attract more passengers as roads become more congested. The catchment area for commuting to Bristol is very large (eg from as far as Cheltenham, Taunton and South Wales) and these longer distance journeys could also be attracted to rail. Despite numerous setbacks, there remains the possibility to develop light-rail metro systems for the Bristol and Bournemouth conurbations.

Growth in the popularity of electric bikes widens the catchment area of stations without a commensurate need for additional car-parking space.

Innovative freight systems under development could be used to move parcels and palletised goods by rail. A recent proposal for faster, shorter container trains could impact positively on rail freight competitiveness at Avonmouth.

Outcomes from the Williams review need to be implemented, especially simpler fares.

**9** What do you think are the greatest **threats** for rail in the Western Gateway?

Some routes in the study area are vulnerable to flooding due to high rainfall or rising sea level; there's a need for greater resilience to extreme weather events, eg through upgrading of diversionary routes.

Housing and commercial development should not encroach on former railway trackbeds that have the potential to be brought back into use as operational rail routes. In addition to safeguarding trackbeds, planning guidelines need to be used to ensure that local authorities retain rail freight facilities.

Organisational upheaval in the rail industry for purely political ends leads to low staff morale and delays in investment.

Devolution of public transport responsibilities to SNTBs without commensurate levels of funding would be a recipe for disaster. The study area risks losing out to regions with a stronger voice such as Northern Powerhouse.

Calls for greater frequency and faster journey times between London and the South West / South Wales could impact negatively on some intermediate stations in the study area.

The replacement of diesel traction should keep pace with the decarbonisation of road transport otherwise rail will lose its environmental advantage. The use of hybrid motive power should only be regarded as a stop-gap measure.

Some older fleets like SWR's Class 159s are increasingly unreliable, without any plans for upgrade or replacement.

RMT industrial action continues to affect all SWR services even though the dispute is largely about manning arrangements for trains in the London area.

## FURTHER COMMENTS

This section will allow you to provide any further comments in text form, or upload supplementary documents or reports for us to capture as part of our Rail Strategy.

**10** Do you have any further comments - specific to your organisation or otherwise - regarding rail in the Western Gateway area?

### Regional Context

Representing roughly one half of the long-established South West Region of England, Western Gateway is relatively small both geographically and in terms of population. Clearly there needs to be close co-operation with the neighbouring SNTBs, in particular Peninsula Transport, during the formulation of a transport strategy. Apart from the planned Bristol Metro, there is no self-contained railway network in Western Gateway that lends itself to SNTB oversight.

### Parkway Omission

The Western Gateway "Rail Demand" map produced by WSP needs to show the new station at Worcestershire Parkway. Although just outside the study area, it has the important role of improving connections between two routes which pass through the study area.

This response was formulated by Railfuture Wessex and Severnside Branches with help and advice from the Railfuture Board.

Sent Mon 30 Dec at 15:15h