

# **Cabinet**

## **8 September 2020**

### **Sub-national Partnerships**

#### **For Decision**

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

**Local Councillor(s):** All Dorset Councillors

**Executive Director:** John Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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**Report Status:** Public

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Cabinet approves the continuation of Dorset Council's membership of the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body;
- 2) Cabinet approves the submission of an expression of interest from Dorset Council with BCP Council to join the Western Gateway Powerhouse and that negotiation of the detailed terms be delegated to the Executive Director of Place.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations:**

For Cabinet to take a strategic view of the current and future sub-national partnerships Dorset Council should be engaged with to ensure that these are in line with its vision, plan and priorities. To secure the opportunity of future Government infrastructure funding for Dorset.

#### **1. Executive Summary**

Dorset Council is part of several sub-regional and sub-national partnerships for different purposes involving different directorates and service areas. Many of the partnerships cover different geographical areas. Recently, a new sub-national partnership has begun to form and is asking Dorset Council to be part of them. This report sets out the main sub-national partnership the Council is part of for infrastructure, and another that it could have a future interest in, enabling Cabinet to take a strategic view. Cabinet is asked to note that the current intention for

Dorset Council is to express an interest in membership of the evolving Western Gateway Powerhouse given its strong synergy with the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body (STB). BCP Council has already agreed to join this partnership and if this Council also joins, the Dorset area is then best placed to benefit from future government infrastructure funding.

## **2. Financial Implications**

None of the partnerships request revenue funding from the Council currently. There is a future expectation that capital funding will be required from the Council to the Western Gateway STB as match funding towards future Government funded schemes, should there be any for Dorset.

## **3. Climate implications**

The work of the Western Gateway STB is focussed on delivering a sustainable transport system that will deliver economic growth whilst reducing carbon emissions from transport.

## **4. Other Implications**

The creation of an active travel network across the region will improve physical activity and sustainability.

## **5. Risk Assessment**

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

## **6. Equalities Impact Assessment**

This is a report about the partnerships the Council is involved with or would consider being involved with in future. The Council would want to ensure any partnership it is involved with supports an approach that champions equality and diversity.

## **7. Appendices**

None

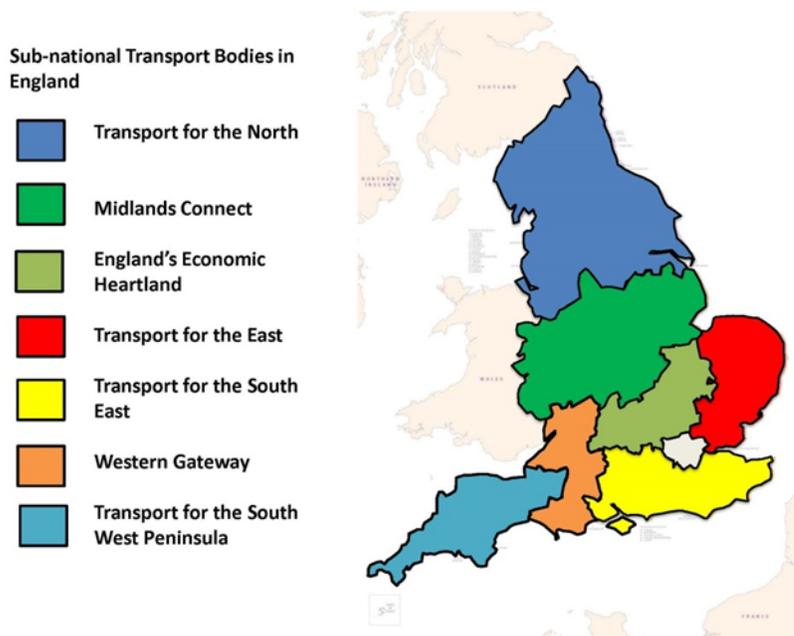
## **8. Background Papers**

None

## 9. Transport Partnerships

- 9.1 Local authorities across England have responded to the Government's request for greater strategic thinking about transport investment by forming Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs). STBs were identified, with accompanying legislation, within the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. The Act enables existing individual authorities to formally join in a partnership to produce a Strategic Transport Plan and represent its members in discussions with Government on the delivery of strategic transport infrastructure. STB's now cover the United Kingdom (excluding London) as outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Sub-National Transport Bodies in England



- 9.2 In response to the climate change emergency and the COVID19 crisis, STBs collectively strive to create a sustainable transport system that is user focussed. Together they not only want reduced congestion on our roads and better public transport, improved walking and cycling choices, but believe in improving the lives of people and businesses, rebalancing the UK economy and turning the regions outside of London into exciting places to grow and thrive for generations to come.
- 9.3 The framework and broad geographies for STB's were defined by Government, although the decision on the precise geographical coverage of each STB was given to local partners. The crucial point with STBs is that they are now the main conduit for significant infrastructure funding rather than through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). They also provide a direct forum for discussing prioritised investment with

Government as well as Highways England and Network Rail amongst other key stakeholders.

- 9.4 Dorset Council is a member of the Western Gateway STB (see fig. 1 above) which is formed by an alliance of nine local authorities with a commitment to work together to drive innovation, maximise economic growth and improve industrial productivity by strengthening travel connections to local, national and international markets.
- 9.5 The Western Gateway STB is currently forming a Strategic Transport Plan (for both the short and long term) to consider all modes of transport within the context of strategic travel. Considering connectivity at a sub-national level enables local authorities to consider the role and function of the complete travel corridor instead of only focusing on local issues within their administrative boundary. It also recognises the collective impact of schemes and their mutual benefit across a wider area regardless of where the improvement is physically located. For example routes north-south from the south coast ports to the M4 corridor.
- 9.6 The investment priorities may include a variety of improvements including passenger transport schemes; strategic cycle schemes, highway capacity schemes; urban traffic management schemes; green travel infrastructure or integrated ticketing solutions – all with an overarching need to decarbonise the transport network in line with the government's emerging Transport Decarbonisation Plan.
- 9.7 BCP Council is also a member of the Western Gateway STB and as with many economic and land use arrangements it is crucial for the County area that both BCP and Dorset Councils are aligned as close partners. Our relevant Portfolio Holders both currently sit on the WGSTB Board with senior officer support.
- 9.8 Members of the Western Gateway STB are committed to working together and providing a single voice to Government on strategic transport investment and prioritisation. This makes working with the Department for Transport (DfT), Highways England and Network Rail much more streamlined and results in fewer, but much more coordinated and powerful conversations while removing the risk of competing local priorities.
- 9.9 The long term Strategic Transport Plan (to be adopted in March 2023) will have an extended timeframe to 2050 and will provide long-term certainty for the stakeholders the plan represents. It will be used to inform future Government investment decisions post 2025.
- 9.10 The STB is not about taking decisions and responsibilities away from local communities, instead it focuses on strengthening delivery by

demonstrating strategic leadership and working collaboratively for material advantage for the Western Gateway area.

- 9.11 This month the Western Gateway STB Board has agreed to commence its consultation on its emerging Strategic Transport Plan with a vision: “To enable sustainable economic growth by identifying a long-term investment programme designed to deliver a well-connected, reliable and resilient strategic transport system; that supports the nation to recover from the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic; influences the carbon reduction agenda; closes productivity gaps and makes the Western Gateway area more competitive, while respecting its world class natural and built environments”.

## **10. The Western Gateway Powerhouse**

- 10.1 Significantly, the Local Authority members of the WGSTB are all members of the emerging Western Gateway Powerhouse other than Dorset Council and BCP Council. This partnership is still forming. Its draft prospectus suggests that its geography covers a similar geography as the Western Gateway STB with the addition of South Wales.
- 10.2 Launched in November 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cross-border-western-gateway-will-form-new-powerhouse-in-uk-economy> the Western Gateway Powerhouse states it is a “partnership to, adding value to existing governance and business structures, focussing on the areas where scale and collaboration can achieve inclusive and sustainable growth for our people and the wider UK economy. Covering the cross-border gateway from Swindon to Swansea and Weston super mare to Tewkesbury – we are the UK’s newest powerhouse. We already outperform UK average output (excluding London) but our ambition is to become a green dynamo for the future economy”.
- 10.3 It has three ambitions: -
- Accelerate agglomeration benefits and modal shift through sustainable inter/intra region connectivity
  - Drive export and investment led growth, marketing its clean growth expertise to the world
  - Catalyse cross-sectoral innovation in its distinctive high-tech sectors, universities and R&D assets.
- 10.4 The Western Gateway Powerhouse is now inviting Dorset Council and BCP Council to confirm our position. Dorset Council Cabinet is being asked to show its intent to join the Western Gateway Powerhouse and a decision has already been made for BCP Council to join subject to confirmation of Dorset Council’s formal position.

10.5 In future there may be a move to unite and reduce the number of existing sub-national partnerships. Both the Western Gateway Powerhouse and the Great South West partnerships have areas of focus that are important to Dorset Council.

## **11. Conclusion**

11.1 Sub-national Transport Bodies are the conduit through which Government funding shall flow for major transport investment into the future. Dorset Council is currently a partner in the Western Gateway STB. Strategic Transport Plans based on an evidence base are forming ready for consultation. The emerging priority themes are linked to improving sustainable transport within the Dorset area as well as two further connectivity corridors set to directly influence strategic travel in both east-west and north-south directions while seeking to better connect Dorset and BCP ports and airports. STBs either side of the Western Gateway STB do not include outcomes for Dorset, assuming these will be addressed by the Western Gateway STB.

11.2 A wider grouping of the Western Gateway members plus South Wales called the Western Gateway Powerhouse has recently formed and there is strong potential for both BCP and Dorset Councils to now join. In future there may be a move to unite and reduce the number of sub-national groups.

11.3 The Chancellor of Exchequer recently announced in the March budget speech government support for an economic review of the Western Gateway Powerhouse area and Highways England through its Route Investment Strategy, has confirmed the need for a strategic transport study between the M4 and Dorset Coast. It is therefore important for both Dorset and BCP Council to draw on these benefits by being members of both the Western Gateway STB and the Western Gateway Powerhouse in order to strengthen its relative position in seeking out strategic investment linked to both economic and infrastructure improvements.

### **Footnote:**

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.