

Western Gateway Partnership – Regional Energy Strategic Plan policy framework consultation

About the Western Gateway Partnership

The Western Gateway is the pan-regional partnership for South Wales and Western England.



We are made up of Local Authorities, one Mayoral Combined Authority in England, two Corporate Joint Committees in Wales, and working with Governments in both Cardiff and Westminster, together covering a population of 5 million people and a combined economy worth £130 billion.

We have been working collaboratively with industry and academia to ensure our area collaborates at scale to support the work of the UK and Welsh Governments in driving growth across the whole UK in a way that benefits all our communities. Through this collaboration, we are ready to overcome barriers, to add at least a further £34billion to the UK economy.

The Western Gateway is unique in being the first pan-regional partnership to build political and economic connections between two countries within our union. With support from across the area and local political backing, we are working to help the UK

with its national mission to create economic growth, whilst also bringing our nations together to build on our potential to be world leading in green energy and AI.

Consultation Response

Question 6: What are your views on the three building blocks which come together to form the RESP in line with our vision? Are there any key components missing?

“We propose each RESP should include a long-term vision alongside a series of directive strategic net zero pathways that show energy projections and guide system need. The RESP should be developed collaboratively and based on relevant local and national data inputs”

We agree with this strategic approach and believe that pan-regional partnerships, such as the Western Gateway Partnership, can play a role in providing some ready-made building blocks to support the NESO role in realising RESP.

We have a distinct and valuable offer as a Western Gateway Partnership. As the only pan-regional partnership to cover two nations of the United Kingdom, our geography comprises 28 Local Authorities across our geography with a Mayoral Combined Authority and two Corporate Joint Committees.

We also have a range of heavily engaged private sector organisations alongside our universities. We have public, private and Higher Education representation at Board level and host pan-regional committees for areas such as nuclear, hydrogen and energy systems.

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. We currently have active working relationships with organisations such as NESO, Great British Nuclear, Wales & West Utilities, SSE Energy Systems and a range of industrial cluster partners. We also convene an ‘Energy Officer Group’ which includes all of our Local Authorities and key stakeholders such as SW Net Zero Hub and Wales Energy Service.

Gala events hosted by the Western Gateway, such as the Hydrogen Gateway¹ and our Convention for the Western Gateway 2024² demonstrate our convening capacity to bring expertise together around the energy opportunity in South Wales and Western England.

The Severn Edge case study³, where a consortium of partners convened and led by the Western Gateway has come together to bring new nuclear investment to Oldbury

¹“Western Gateway Hydrogen Brochure”, Western Gateway, August 2023, URL: <https://western-gateway.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Western-Gateway-Hydrogen-Brochure-3-Aug-v3.pdf>

² “Businesses Sign Up to Sponsor the 2024 Convention for the Western Gateway”, *Business News Wales*, 30 September 2024, URL: <https://businessnewswales.com/businesses-sign-up-to-sponsor-the-2024-convention-for-the-western-gateway/>

³ “Our Projects: Severn Edge”, Western Gateway, URL: <https://western-gateway.co.uk/our-projects/severn-edge/>

& Berkeley. The dual-site approach has benefitted from widespread and cross-party political support but has grown a significant industry support behind this. The Partnership was able to forge a shared, ambitious strategic vision and is now supporting multiple investors through delivery (supply-chain engagement, communications, stakeholder and community engagement, master-planning etc.)

The Independent Severn Estuary Commission⁴, convened by the Western Gateway, is a further demonstrator of the Partnership's capacity to tackle issues of national importance and of scale that is entirely dependent on a pan-regional approach. The Commission is made up of a diverse group of experts from scientific, engineering, environmental backgrounds, and will explore whether using the Severn Estuary to create sustainable power is attainable and viable. With one of the highest tidal ranges in the world, it has been estimated that it has the potential to create up to 7 per cent of the UK's total electricity needs.

Were the Western Gateway Partnership not in existence, then similar networks or bodies would need to be created to initiate these pan-regional conversations. However, through the pan-regional partnership model, we are able to act as a convenor, bringing relevant stakeholders together on the specific opportunity, within the wider and well-evidenced strategic economic context.

Question 10. Do you agree with the purpose of the Strategic Board? Please provide your reasoning.

Question 11. Do you agree that the Strategic Board should include representation from relevant democratic actors, network companies and wider cross-sector actors in each region?

"Regional governance – we propose each region should have a Strategic Board, made up of local and devolved government and network company representatives. The Strategic Board should facilitate transparency, heighten visibility of regional priorities and provide oversight of the RESP development"

"Boundaries – we propose eleven regions across Great Britain. One region covering Wales, one region covering Scotland and a further nine regions covering England"

We welcome the proposal to create a Strategic Board across the regions. but would ask that you also explore the means by which your regional Strategic Boards can interact with each other.

In particular we see considerable value in a relationship between Wales and the South West; a relationship that is demonstrably important by work that we have been leading over the past four years in this pan-regional geography.

⁴ "Thames Meneth, "Commission to re-examine tidal energy on Severn Estuary", *Ground Engineering*, 20 March 2024, URL: <https://www.geplus.co.uk/news/commission-to-explore-tidal-energy-on-severn-estuary-20-03-2024/>

There are nationally - even internationally - significant energy projects across our geography that span the Wales and South West geographies. Of particular note these include the Celtic Sea Floating Offshore Wind programme, new nuclear at Oldbury, electric arc furnace transition at Port Talbot, and the growing hydrogen industry, now spear-headed by the GW-SHIFT programme⁵, a joint collaboration between the Western Gateway and the GW4 University Alliance, representing (Bath, Bristol Cardiff and Exeter Universities).

We believe that a continued cross-border relationship will be vital to:

- Understand the future demands on the grid of nationally-significant cross-border programmes
- Understand the significant shared opportunities (but also competition) for supply-chains and training
- Proactively develop that shared vision and political and community appetite for low carbon energy
- Maintain agility through breadth of stakeholder reach

Question 12. How should actors (democratic, network, cross-sector) be best represented on the board? Please provide your reasoning, referring to each in turn

We believe that pan-regional partnerships, such as the Western Gateway, should have a position on the Strategic Boards that cover their geography.

The proposed RESP regions are currently not coterminous with the geographies of any existing Mayoral Combined Authority, or the proposed devolution deals across England⁶. Pan-regional partnerships are able to offer perspectives from a greater geography than any local or Combined authority. The Western Gateway in particular is well placed to facilitate these cross-border discussions as our geography covers areas in both England and Wales.

Our ask and offer is that the existing Western Gateway geography and governance is recognised as both credible and valuable in realising the ambitions of RESPs, and minimising the risk of any siloed approach. We would welcome further discussion about how our governance can add value to your work.

⁵ "Multimillion pound investment to develop hydrogen supercluster in South West England and South Wales", GW4, 5 October 2023, URL: <https://gw4.ac.uk/news/multimillion-pound-investment-to-develop-hydrogen-supercluster-in-south-west-england-and-south-wales/#:~:text=GW-SHIFT%20will%20develop%20a%20place-based%20supercluster%20that%20will>

⁶ "Devolution map: Revolution gives way to evolution", *Local Government Chronicle*, 7 October 2024, URL: <https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/devolution-and-economic-growth/devolution-map-revolution-gives-way-to-evolution-07-10-2024/>