

**England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum
Background Briefing**

1. Background

- 1.1. The original catalyst for the Strategic Alliance came from the Political leadership of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire County Councils.
- 1.2. Their initiative was driven by a common recognition of the fact that:
 - In terms of strategic infrastructure the issues (and solutions) extend beyond any one single authority area
 - The case for sustained levels of investment in areas outside of London and 'the North' needs to be made within Government
 - There is a need for stronger integration of investment by Government (and its agencies) with that made by Local Authorities
- 1.3. It was on this basis that the original ambition was set out shortly before Christmas 2014. Subsequently, building on the existing evidence base, a more detailed transport proposition was submitted to Government at the end of July 2015 and shared with wider stakeholders.
- 1.4. Government reaction has been positive, as has been the reaction from stakeholder interests, with both groups acknowledging the vision and ambition set out in the proposition.
- 1.5. As a consequence, the proposal to establish the Strategic Transport Forum is being taken forward – initially as a non-statutory partnership. Seven Local Transport Authorities (8 if Cambridgeshire County Council join) have agreed to participate, with invitations extended to 4 Local Enterprise Partnerships (with an expectation that an invitation will also now be extended to Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP), Government departments and agencies, transport service providers and the construction industry.
- 1.6. An initial meeting of the Forum is currently planned for early 2016: in the meantime officers are continuing to work on the detail of the Forum and associated work programme.

2. Strategic Alliance Leaders meetings

- 2.1. The Political Leaders have been meeting on a regular – approximately bi-monthly – basis since the start of the year: these are referred to as 'Strategic Alliance Leaders' meetings.
- 2.2. A statement of purpose for those meetings was scoped out in October.
- 2.3. Political Leaders at the meetings have been supported by a senior (usually Executive Director) officer. The meetings are also attended by the Chairman of the LEPs, supported by their Chief Executives.
- 2.4. The meetings are not public, and are treated as providing the Leaders with the opportunity to discuss issues of common interest candidly, without prejudice or commitment on the part of any partner. The papers for the meeting are treated as confidential as a consequence.

- 2.5. The Leaders meeting discussions guided the development of the Strategic Transport Proposition – this demonstrates how a discussion at the Leaders meeting identifies an issue of common interest; officers are tasked to develop a proposal; the Leaders discuss and agreed the way forward; and then that forms the basis for further work.
- 2.6. The Leaders can then move on to consider other issues of potential interest – remembering that it's not essential for every partner to be involved in every piece of work.
- 2.7. The Leaders have recently started to consider broader 'strategic infrastructure' issues – something that was flagged in the original brochure setting out the ambition for the Alliance.
- 2.8. When talking about strategic infrastructure we're starting to use the definition of 'strategic infrastructure' associated with the National Infrastructure Commission.

3. Strategic Transport Forum

- 3.1. It was clear quite quickly that transport infrastructure was an area that all the partners felt comfortable developing a more detailed proposition. The detailed transport proposition was submitted to the Chancellor in July 2015.
- 3.2. The proposition is a framework – not a prescriptive menu of what will be done: it will be for the members of the Forum to agree its work programme and priorities
- 3.3. The Forum is in the process of being established – first meeting is pencilled in for 12th February: time is being taken in advance of it to develop the working relationships across the partners: this is being done through officer meetings.
- 3.4. It is for partners to put forward their nomination to sit on the Forum – so far, we have a combination of Cabinet Portfolio holders and Leaders: the first Chairman of the Forum is Cllr Jim Harker (Northamptonshire providing leadership in the development of the original strategic transport proposition)
- 3.5. Meetings of the Strategic Transport Forum will be held in public – affording the opportunity for interested bodies (including local planning authorities) to be involved.
- 3.6. The Government amendment to enable the establishment of statutory 'Sub-national Transport Bodies) has been warmly welcomed by the Political leaders –there is a proposal that the partners make a statement of intent that this is their preferred direction of travel.
- 3.7. It will be for the partners to put forward a proposal for a Sub-national Transport Body the Secretary of State for them to consider and agree. The expectation is that this would take 12-18 months to establish – meantime the partners are committed to pushing ahead with Strategic Transport Forum: this shows a statement of intent on the part of the Alliance partners and also enables progress to be made in those areas that are within their control.
- 3.8. Local Transport Authorities remain sovereign bodies under these proposals. The establishment of the Strategic Transport Forum does not preclude local 'devo deals' being developed and put forward – Oxfordshire submitted a proposal in September

4. Executive Programme Support

- 4.1. Martin Tugwell is employed through Buckinghamshire County Council on a contract basis – with around two-thirds of his dedicated to support the Strategic Alliance on behalf of all partners. For 2015/16 his costs have been shared between the three County Councils.
- 4.2. Martin has been supported by Lyndsey Cox – also employed by Buckinghamshire County Council. Lyndsey's costs are covered by Buckinghamshire. Northamptonshire County Council have provided leadership on communications support on behalf of the Alliance partners – working in liaison with other comms teams on a virtual basis.
- 4.3. The basis of the Alliance is to draw on resources across the partners wherever possible – but there is a recognition that there is a need for a small dedicated team to co-ordinate activity and act as the 'glue' for the Alliance's work.
- 4.4. A work programme and resourcing plan for 2016/17 is being prepared for consideration by the partners.

5. What's Happening Elsewhere?

- 5.1. Transport for the North (TfN) already exists as a sub-national transport partnership. There are a number of similarities between it and the Strategic Transport Forum. However, the most significant difference is the nature of the relationship with the Department for Transport (DfT) and its agencies (Highways England and Network Rail).
- 5.2. This is set out in a public document signed by the DfT and the Chairman of TfN. Whilst the agreement recognises that the Secretary of State retains accountability to Parliament for the investment made by Highways England and Network Rail, there is a 'dual key' on all investment decisions.
- 5.3. The legislative change will put TfN on a statutory basis, reinforcing the ability of local partners to hold national agencies to account, in particular with regard to the co-design of investment programmes. It will also strengthen the role of TfN inputting into the work of the National Infrastructure Commission.
- 5.4. The Midlands Connect initiative –supported by DfT – may pursue a similar route to that followed by TfN.

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