

Report to: **Partnership Board –Transport for the South East**

Date of meeting: **22 July 2021**

By: **Chair of the Transport Forum**

Title of report: **Transport Forum Update**

Purpose of report: **To summarise the Transport Forum meetings of 18 March and 22 June 2021 and inform the Board of the Transport Forum’s recommendations.**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to:

- (1) Note the recent meetings of the Transport Forum;**
 - (2) Note and consider the comments from the Forum; and**
 - (3) Note and consider the topics to be discussed at future Forum meetings.**
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1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Partnership Board on the most recent meetings of the Transport Forum and the Forum’s future work plan.

1.2 Due to the current situation with Covid-19 the meetings took place virtually and were attended by more than 50 members of the Forum.

2. Feedback from the Transport Forum Meeting on 18 March 2021

2.1 The meeting was a shortened version following the Mobility 2050 webinar.

2.2 The forum discussed the Mobility 2050 Webinar and agreed it was interesting to hear about the progress on the future mobility strategy and they enjoyed the insights from the panelists. The forum also received updates on the work programme.

3. Feedback from the Transport Forum Meeting on 22 June 2021

Bus Back Better

3.1 Andrew Wilson, Public Transport Manager at Hampshire County Council explained the two main features of the Government’s Bus Back Better plan - bus service improvement plans and enhanced partnerships. Andrew also outlined how Hampshire are approaching the strategy.

3.2 Andrew raised some key challenges including; how to define the asks of operators; how they ensure operators work together when there are issues of competition; and possible cross boundary issues.

3.3 Andrew believes there is a place for the DfT and TfSE to share learning as widely as possible.

3.4 Edward Hodgson (Managing Director, Stagecoach South) and Martin Harris (Managing Director, Brighton & Hove Buses & Metrobus) also gave a presentation from

an operator's perspective. Edward explained the importance of enhanced partnerships between bus operators and local transport authorities and emphasised that an important aspect of the plan is road space reallocation / bus priority.

3.5 They explained that clarity was needed on funding and there needed to be a consistency in policy across Government and local authorities.

3.6 Rural mobility issues were raised including the need to identify and trial alternative bus solutions for rural communities. Examples of best practice can be drawn from across the country.

3.7 Another crucial aspect in improving the bus experience for passengers is to continue to support and roll out smarter payment systems. There is a need and desire to overcome issues to integrate payments across modes.

3.8 A key aspect that was identified by TfSE and the speakers, was that to succeed with this plan, ambition is required. Ambition is needed to attract and receive the funding.

Summary of Forum comments

3.9 The Forum queried how the rural issues could be tackled - how DRT schemes could become commercially viable and how other, alternative operators (e.g. community transport) could help. However, there is no easy answer and local transport authorities are doing their best to trial schemes and think creatively.

3.10 The forum also discussed the need for a strategic view to ensure collaboration across boundaries. It is also important for the whole end to end journey to be understood so it can be made seamless.

3.11 It was felt that TfSE can assist with this strategic overview, particularly regarding the infrastructure that is required. It could help to speed up the process.

3.12 Comments were raised that TfSE is only focused on roads. Rupert Clubb clarified that this is absolutely not the case. TfSE were asked by the Department for Transport to co-ordinate the prioritisation and submission of MRN / LLM / RIS schemes for the South East, and there is a place for roads, especially when you consider it is used by freight and public transport. However, TfSE are strong advocates of public transport and this is clear in the transport strategy and other work currently underway. TfSE have fed back to the DfT the view that there should not be different funding streams for different travel modes, but that there should be just one for all transport investment. This would allow the right schemes to be put forward for the right amount of funding that would tackle the carbon emissions issue too.

Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail

3.13 Tiff Lynch introduced the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail and outlined some of the key details of the strategy. This included 3 key elements – franchises replaced by passenger service contracts / better fares and ticketing / creating Great British Railways (GBR). Tiff also outlined the practical details surrounding Great British Railways including the need for primary legislation and expected timescales.

3.14 Tiff emphasised that the plan has a strong focus on partnerships, however, it is unclear at the moment how this will look or how it will work.

3.15 Alex Hellier (Head of Strategic Planning - Kent & Sussex, Network Rail) explained some of the key issues identified by Keith Williams. Alex also confirmed that interim arrangements will be put in place and the plan is to get GBR up and running as quickly as possible.

3.16 Silke Elvery (Rail Strategy Planning Manager, Rail Delivery Group) shared her thoughts on the plan. Silke was pleased to see a strong commitment to the private sector and that passengers are central to the proposals. There is still a lot of detail to be defined however, especially around partnerships.

Summary of Forum comments

3.17 The forum questioned the requirements for culture change within the different organisations to ensure GBR does not just become a 'larger Network Rail'. In addition, how might the role of Rail Delivery Group change under these new plans.

3.18 Some positive aspects were identified by the forum as the new arrangements of franchising may bring in new participants from the private sector. There will also be more positive flexibility in the franchising agreements.

3.19 There were questions regarding pricing and fares. However, these are questions for the Government to answer and at the moment, their position remains unclear.

Future Mobility Strategy

3.20 Mark Valleley updated the Forum on the future mobility strategy (further to the webinar held in March). Mark confirmed how the strategy was carried out and what the outcomes are. Mark also talked about next steps for this strategy (including presenting it to the board in July).

Summary of Forum comments

3.21 The main concerns raised by the forum were around freight and how this could operate in the future with concepts such as distribution centres.

Updates

3.22 Jasmin Barnicoat confirmed that the last 2 area studies have now commenced, and work is progressing well with the whole programme. Jasmin confirmed that, as outlined in the presentation at the previous forum meeting, specific to the context and objectives for each study, a wide variety of interventions are being assessed and developed.

3.23 Jasmin outlined that the freight strategy is also progressing well and to date, there has been great engagement in the working group and freight forum.

Summary of Forum comments

3.24 The forum discussed the updates and there were requests for active travel to have a greater influence in the area studies. A query was raised regarding the Government's active travel funding, however Mark confirmed it is for local transport authorities to bid for. TfSE have been clear that they believe there should be a move away from short term competitive bidding, as it is resource intensive for local authorities with no guarantees of a positive outcome. TfSE are clear that we support longer term investment.

4. Future Transport Forum Engagement

4.1 The next meeting of the Transport Forum will be held on Tuesday 21 September 2021. This meeting will be used to understand what role STBs could have in carbon assessment and carbon budgeting. An update will also be given on the work TfSE is doing on decarbonisation.

4.2 A more detailed update will also be given on the area studies and the Strategic Investment Plan.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 It is recommended that the Board note the successful virtual meetings of the Transport Forum and the important communication link this provides TfSE with its key stakeholders. It is also recommended that the Board note the future programme of the Transport Forum.

5.2 It is recommended that the Board note and consider the comments raised by Forum members.

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