

Emailed to: appgsoutheast@secouncils.gov.uk

Wednesday 12 January 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Transport for the South East's response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the South East's call for evidence

I am writing to you as lead officer for [Transport for the South East](#) (TfSE) to provide a response to the call for evidence regarding 'financing the future – what does levelling-up mean for South East England?'

TfSE is a sub-national transport body (STB) bringing together leaders from across the local government, business and transport sectors to speak with one voice on our region's strategic transport needs. Since its inception in 2017, TfSE has quickly emerged as a powerful and effective partnership for our region and our ambition is to become a statutory body with devolved powers over key strategic transport issues.

Our principal decision-making body, the [Partnership Board](#), brings together representatives from our 16 constituent local transport authorities, five Local Enterprise Partnerships, district and borough authorities, protected landscapes, Highways England, Network Rail and Transport for London. Together, our partnership represents more than 7 million people and 350,000 businesses in the South East and benefits from invaluable expertise and insight from those responsible for our region's strategic transport networks.

The South East has much to offer in the context of devolution and levelling up and the importance of our international gateways on the prosperity of the UK is significant. However, the South East also has some of the most deprived communities in England. The UK's prosperity depends on many local factors including housing, skills provision, the ability to fund services, land use and transport connections as well as the availability of public goods and services. All of this is facilitated by transport and communication links. If we are to build back better and provide opportunities for all then we must look again at what devolution can offer the levelling up agenda.

We believe TfSE offers a credible vehicle for devolution and levelling up in the South East. Our partnership has clear democratic accountability, strong stakeholder support and engagement, a track record of delivery in partnership with local and national partners, a thirty-year transport strategy in place and a strategic investment plan imminent.

We are ready to receive greater powers and responsibilities to support a devolved approach and we would encourage government to consider a devolved approach to infrastructure investment

funding, enabling partnerships such as ours to deliver the kinds of transformational integrated investment programmes needed to support sustainable economic recovery and growth and meet our carbon commitments. We would hope that these points are addressed in the forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper. It is important the White Paper recognises that Sub-national Transport Bodies can offer a mechanism for devolution in areas such as the South East which do not currently have mayoral combined authorities.

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Sub-national Transport Bodies' place-based approach enables infrastructure investment to level up areas. STBs have worked quickly and effectively, adding value by supporting the decision makers in Whitehall and Westminster. Using the strength of their partnership, STBs set a clear strategic direction for improved connectivity within their regions, as well as inter-regional journeys. STBs bring together the void between land use planning and transport and provide a spatial context to improve prosperity. By the end of 2021, each of the seven STBs in England had a transport strategy/plan in place or in draft. Developed using robust evidence bases, in partnership with planning authorities, and through public consultation, these provide a focal point for prioritising infrastructure investment across English regions. As democratically accountable sub national bodies, STBs provide a unified voice to the Government by setting objectives and aligning activity across their regions. STBs are supported locally and their important role has been recognised by Ministers. There is a clear opportunity for STBs to take a greater role, given their wealth of knowledge and collaborative approaches at regional level, to assist Government in delivering on the levelling-up agenda.

Central government funding approaches should adapt to help us meet the levelling up challenge. At a national level, transport infrastructure priorities tend to be identified on a network or modal basis with separate nationally significant infrastructure priorities identified for road and rail. This siloed approach to investment tends to lead to the development of specific schemes aimed at solving a particular problem or to bring about general improvements in network performance. Arguably the focus on facilitating the economic recovery from Covid-19 and levelling up particular areas, requires a more integrated, place based, programme approach to infrastructure investment that looks across different transport modes and different types of economic infrastructure. This is needed ensure that the right interventions are identified that will maximise the benefits of infrastructure investment in a particular area. The approach to scheme appraisal will also need to evolve to enable the benefits of cross-sectoral programmes of investment spanning different Government departments to be identified. A devolved regional investment pot would enable public and private sector partners, via STBs or other suitable devolved structures, to better plan and deliver the kinds of schemes which can enable genuinely transformational change and meet the levelling up challenge.

Ultimately strengthening regional infrastructure planning capability would facilitate a more integrated and place based approach to infrastructure provision at the regional and local level. It would also, crucially, support a more integrated approach to both social and economic infrastructure development, design and implementation needed to deliver increased housing supply and the Government's levelling up agenda while achieving net zero carbon emissions.

STBs are focused on place-based outcomes rather than siloed infrastructure funding streams. Their transport strategies incorporate both local and national policy outcomes allowing local partnerships to more effectively prioritise, manage and deliver a portfolio of infrastructure relevant to a place. STBs therefore have the ability to land complex policy and funding models into a place. By working with STBs, Government can operate within the silos that exist and yet still be assured that, at a regional level, STBs will take a place-based and multimodal approach to connectivity. A regional funding allocation would enable more effective prioritisation and ensure that the longer term investment pipelines that flow from the STB's transport strategies are affordable.

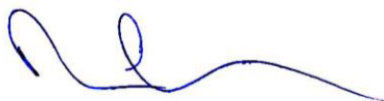
We believe Government should be flexible about its approach to devolution and who should co-ordinate levelling-up activity. For those locations, including the South East, that have either not been central to discussions around devolution or are not suited to current approaches around mayoral combined authorities, other ways to devolve should be considered.

Levelling up presents an opportunity to devolve the tools needed to bring about a step change in prosperity that not only benefits the South East but the wider UK economy. We know transport is a major facilitator of growth and the bold ambition of TfSE enables local communities to thrive and attract inward investment. In addition, it provides the key network for the movement of goods and service to the rest of the UK, supporting union connectivity through the South East extensive network of ports and airports.

TfSE consents to this response being placed on your webpage and both officers and political leaders of TfSE are more than happy to speak at a meeting of the APPG if further insight is required.

This is an officer response. The TfSE Partnership Board meets on 24 January 2022 and will consider the draft response and a further iteration of this response may therefore follow.

Yours sincerely,



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