

Submission from Transport for the South East

Transport for the South East response to Transport Select Committee Inquiry: Strategic Road Investment in England

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Transport for the South East (TfSE) is a sub-national transport body (STB), which represents sixteen local transport authorities. These are Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, Hampshire, Kent, Medway, Surrey, West Sussex, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton, and the six Berkshire unitary authorities. Authorities are represented on the Shadow Partnership Board along with representatives from the region's five Local Enterprise Partnerships, District and Borough authorities, the protected landscapes in the TfSE area, Highways England, Network Rail and Transport for London.
- 1.2 TfSE provides a single voice on the transport interventions needed to support sustainable economic growth across its geography. The south east is crucial to the UK economy and is the nation's major international gateway for people and business with some of the largest ports and airports in the country. High-quality transport infrastructure is critical to making the south east more competitive, contributing to national prosperity and improving the lives of our residents.
- 1.3 Transport for the South East welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Transport Select Committee inquiry into Strategic Road Investment in England.

2.0 General comments

- 2.1 Ministers have set out 2 core functions that the Department for Transport (DfT) supports STB's to deliver:
1. Develop and maintain a transport strategy for our region.
 2. Provide advice to Ministers on prioritising transport investment.
- 2.2 In 2020 TfSE published a thirty-year transport strategy that sets out an ambitious 2050 vision for the area. Through a programme of area studies we identified multimodal packages of transport interventions that will be needed to deliver the transport strategy, alongside developing a freight and logistics strategy, future mobility strategy and decarbonisation pathways work. Underpinned by this credible, evidence based technical programme, we consulted on our draft Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) in the autumn of 2022. When published in spring 2023, the SIP will present a compelling case for future decision making which will help us create a more productive, healthier, happier and more sustainable south east.
- 2.3 Our SIP aligns with and supports government priorities to rapidly decarbonise the transport system, improve public health outcomes, reduce congestion and improve road safety, level-up left-behind communities and facilitate sustainable economic growth in the south east. However, we are clear that it cannot be growth at any cost. We need to make better use of existing assets and corridors and make sure new and emerging technology is used to its full potential to boost physical and digital connectivity. There is a need for more joined up planning,

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particularly between transport and housing, to help build more sustainable communities and enable more efficient business operations, putting the strategic transport infrastructure in place that enables communities to thrive and live happier, healthier, more active lives. Securing the right investment in the SRN is a crucial part in delivering our transport strategy.

- 2.4 National Highways operate under a licence through which the Secretary of State for Transport sets out statutory directions and guidance. Given the role and importance of STB's transport strategies in setting out how the whole transport system in their areas should be developed we would ask that Government consider amending the licence to reflect the role of STB's and in doing so require National Highways to formally consider the advice provided by STB's through their transport strategies and investment plans, and to provide a formal response as to how that advice is reflected in the Road Investment Strategy.

3.0 How effectively the current Road Investment Strategy (RIS2) enhancements portfolio has been managed to date;

- 3.1 In common with other STB's TfSE provided advice to Government on the south east's priorities for investment in the SRN through RIS2. However, unfortunately there was then no further engagement as to how that advice was reflected in the RIS2 document prior to its publication.
- 3.2 Through the development and appraisal of schemes, there still seems to be a strong focus on the economic case for the intervention. The HM Treasury "Green book" review stressed the need to provide a greater focus on the strategic case in decision making, to ensure that projects demonstrate how they contribute to wider local, regional and government objectives. TfSE welcomes this approach. Greater engagement with STB's, aligning with our transport strategies and investment plans, is crucial to develop a strong strategic case for interventions to support this aim.
- 3.3 TfSE supports the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR) role and approach to their assessment of the government's and National Highways' plans for the development of RIS3. A key aspect of the ORR's consideration about whether National Highways have met the requirements of their license, is to determine the extent to which they have exercised their duties in a manner that is 'open and transparent', 'positive and responsive', and 'collaborative'. The way in which TfSE and National Highways work collaboratively together has improved significantly over recent years, and this is welcomed. We have agreed a Joint Engagement Action Plan and have strong working relationships across a number of technical work areas.

4.0 Whether risks to the enhancements portfolio for the remainder of the RIS2 period are being well managed;

- 4.1 TfSE has limited information about risk to the portfolio of RIS2 schemes and how it is being managed, and therefore we are not able to specifically comment on this question.

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4.2 A number of RIS2 schemes are included within our SIP, and so we would request that any significant risks to scheme delivery in our area should be shared allowing us comment on any proposed mitigation plans, and to consider any impacts on our own wider investment programme.

5.0 What the impacts of delays and cost overruns are on the overall programme, and whether the revised programme can be delivered to schedule and on budget;

5.1 TfSE is not sighted on the detail of delays and cost overruns within RIS2 Programme and therefore cannot comment on this question.

5.2 We understand that there are budget pressures and also that delays to a number of RIS2 schemes is creating a funding tail that will need to be carried forward, potentially impacting on the number of new schemes able to be taken forward in RIS3. A number of RIS2 and RIS3 pipeline schemes are included within our SIP, and so we would request our inclusion in any review of the overall programme or scope of any schemes in our region ensuring that we can consider any impacts on the timing of schemes or broader connectivity issues affecting our own wider investment programme.

6.0 What progress is being made on planning for the next Road Investment Strategy;

6.1 TfSE strongly welcomes the increased engagement and input that we have had with both DfT and National Highways in planning for the next Road Investment Strategy. It is imperative that the evidence base developed through our transport strategy and SIP underpins and drives planning for RIS3.

6.2 National Highways engaged with TfSE and our local authority partners through a series of workshops as they gathered evidence for their Route Strategies, providing us the opportunity to input on the issues, challenges and opportunities for the SRN. This represents a step change from the previous RIS2 planning process. It has enabled the consideration of the regional priorities set out in in our Transport strategy and SIP and provides much greater opportunity for the SRN to be considered as part of the wider transport network and not in isolation. We also welcome the work National Highways have undertaken to consider the role of the SRN in different locations and its impact on the wider environment (particularly in urban areas).

6.3 TfSE have provided National Highways with access to the extensive evidence base developed through our own technical work programme, including our area studies and through the development of our SIP. National Highways colleagues attended our stakeholder groups providing reciprocal information sharing and input, leading to a greater alignment between our respective workstreams and priorities.

6.4 TfSE also provided feedback on the draft Route Strategy Reports relevant to our region and continue to be kept informed of the overall RIS3 development process and programme. We look forward to this

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collaborative approach continuing and to providing further input and feedback through the forthcoming consultations on the SRN Initial Report, Connecting the Country strategy and Route Strategies Overview Reports, and as the Draft RIS3 is developed.

- 6.5 TfSE have also been engaged on work carried out by National Highways on a number of strategic studies and “RIS3 pipeline” schemes within our area. Whilst we are pleased to see this more detailed work and individual schemes progressing, this engagement has not been consistent and has not always been as open or collaborative as that for the strategic level of RIS3 development. This is unfortunate as we consider that TfSE and other STB’s can really add value to National Highways work around the early stages of scheme development when the initial cases are being made for the need for intervention. The outputs from our technical work and the local expertise from the respective local authorities can significantly strengthen the strategic cases for schemes, and it is at this stage that we can assist with setting strategic objectives that consider the SRN holistically as part of the wider transport network. We would welcome greater engagement in these early stages of scheme development.

7.0 What lessons from RIS2 need to be incorporated into RIS3 to ensure it is achievable and delivers on policy objectives;

- 7.1 Since RIS2 STB’s have become more established. Recognising our core function to provide advice to Ministers on prioritising transport investment, we consider that the National Highways Licence should be amended to ensure that the advice provided by STB’s through their transport strategies and investment plans is formally considered and responded to as RIS3 is developed.
- 7.2 The improved engagement and collaboration is welcomed and should be continued throughout the whole RIS3 development process to ensure that the objectives set for RIS3 align with the agreed outcomes for the south east set out in our Transport Strategy and SIP.
- 7.3 The SRN is one component of the wider transport network, and it is imperative that it is considered holistically alongside other networks and modes. This should include, but not be limited to, considering the role of the SRN in facilitating travel by other modes, such as public transport and active travel, the interactions between the SRN and the major and local road networks, and any impacts that occur, including those arising from carbon emissions. Should interventions on the SRN adversely impact other networks, it is vital that any mitigation required is planned and provided for accordingly through that holistic view, and not left to local transport authorities to seek rectify through other programmes.
- 7.4 In planning for RIS3, consideration should also be given to the role of the SRN in facilitating development. Historically, network performance considerations have tended to outweigh role of SRN in providing access to much needed new homes, but this needs to change through a more integrated role of highway infrastructure facilitating development.

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7.5 The SRN also has a vital role to play in supporting local transport plans and targets, for example with the monitoring and reduction in transport related carbon emissions. A holistic view the across whole network will be essential to drive the reductions in demand necessary to meet those carbon reduction targets.

8.0 Whether the Government's current and forthcoming roads investment programme is meeting the current and future needs of consumers and business;

8.1 The top concerns raised by users through Transport Focus' report in August 2021 tended to focus more on the operational role of National Highways. However, to address these challenges it is crucial to ensure the SRN is fit for purpose, and this requires a more integrated view of the function of the SRN within the wider transport network.

8.2 The RIS2 programme is currently delivering a number of improvements across the SRN within the TfSE area providing benefits to consumers and businesses across the region. However, a number of key challenges remain to be addressed on the network in order to provide consumers and businesses with the safe, efficient, reliable and seamless end to end journeys they expect and need from the road network as a whole.

8.3 Congestion and resilience of the SRN remain issues for the SRN across the south east and this undermines the productivity of our economy. Limited east-west connectivity coupled with the SRN being of an inconsistent standard through the region, mean journeys of a similar distance can take widely differing times depending on which part of the network is used. This means the SRN is unable to fulfil its strategic function and that there are few viable alternatives for motorists caught up in disruption.

8.4 Parts of the SRN pass through protected landscapes and urban areas (for example at Worthing, Chichester, Guildford, and Hurst Green) causing environmental and severance issues which undermines the quality of life for residents and compromises the attractiveness of active travel in those communities. The inconsistent standard of the SRN places communities at a disadvantage, including some of our coastal communities which are already among the least prosperous in England.

8.5 The south east serves several of the busiest ports and airports in the UK. While these are generally well connected, there are challenges with managing disruption on some corridors – particularly to Heathrow Airport, Gatwick Airport, Solent Ports and Southampton Airport, and Port of Dover. There is also a need to support growth – notably at Southampton and Gatwick.

8.6 A significant portion of UK international trade passes through the south east. It is critically important that the highway network has the capacity and resilience to manage future disruption and ensure trade can flow as seamlessly as possible. Linked to this it is crucial that appropriate facilities are provided for Freight, including rest areas. The M2 and M20 corridors are

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particularly susceptible to disruption, which can force heavy traffic onto local roads.

- 8.7 TfSE's SIP advocates for a "whole route" approach to planning, not continually adding capacity or creating new corridors, but making existing corridors work for variety of modes. Planning to deliver an end-to-end solution, providing a consistent standard of route that protects landscapes, townscapes and people, supports regeneration and growth, segregates local and strategic traffic and unlocks multi-modal opportunities.
- 8.8 To effectively address these challenges, planning for RIS3 must consider journeys and networks holistically to improve transport outcomes. Separating modes into silos for strategic development regardless of collaboration makes alignment and planning for people and their needs difficult.

9.0 Whether the Government's roads investment programme aligns with other policy priorities, such as decarbonisation, levelling up, productivity and growth;

- 9.1 Through our increased engagement with RIS3 planning and the Route Strategies development, it is clear that a greater emphasis is being given to these wider policy priorities as the SRN Objectives have been developed. It is however vital that there remains a focus on these priorities as individual schemes are developed and investment decisions are taken.
- 9.2 These Government policy priorities are also key priorities within TfSE's transport strategy and SIP. The SIP demonstrates how transport investment in the south east will yield material economic, social, and environmental returns for our residents, businesses, and visitors, improved public health outcomes and support the UK economy enabling Government to achieve its wider carbon, trade, and levelling-up objectives.
- 9.3 The scale of the challenge to meet decarbonisation targets is significant and should not be underestimated. Road transport needs to be rapidly decarbonised if the government's mandated target of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 is to be met. TfSE's Decarbonisation Pathways work identifies that "in order to facilitate an effective pathway to net zero it is paramount to plan to optimise the role of public transport, active travel, and zero emission vehicle interventions, along with demand management and behaviour change interventions."
- 9.4 Therefore the highways interventions within our SIP represent a step-change away from traditional "predict and provide" capacity enhancements of previous decades. Adopting a "decide and provide" approach, aligned with our vision and supporting not only strategic movement of vehicles but our places and communities. Road based interventions must be complimented by others that manage demand and employ digital technology, reduce the number of trips, accelerate the decarbonisation of road vehicles, and promote sustainable travel.

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- 9.5 As described above, the SRN has a crucial role to play in levelling up the south east's left behind communities.
- 9.6 To ensure that the Government's roads investment programme aligns with other policy priorities, such as decarbonisation, levelling up, productivity and growth, it is therefore essential that the advice provided by STB's through their transport strategies and investment plans is formally considered and responded to as RIS3 is developed.

10.0 How RIS3 should take account of technological developments, and evidence on ways of increasing capacity on the Strategic Road Network (such as smart motorways and potential alternatives to them).

- 10.1 The transport sector's response to the decarbonisation challenge is gathering real momentum and it needs to be recognised that, on its own, the conversion of the vehicle fleet to clean fuels will not deliver the reductions in carbon emissions that are needed. The Covid pandemic accelerated trends that had been emerging over decades around home working and virtual access to services. The countries response to the pandemic showed that both our need to travel and the way in which we travel is susceptible to change.
- 10.2 Innovative technologies present opportunities and challenges for transport, enabling manufacturers to improve vehicle safety and environmental performance. Also enabling delivery of new more sustainable ways of transport and business models that improve information, accessibility, and choice for travellers. Properly managed, the transport technologies of the future will make journeys faster, safer, greener, easier, more comfortable, and more affordable. They will make our environments quieter and less polluted, and they will enable us to provide mobility as a service, integrated and accessible to all.
- 10.3 In planning future highways investment, there is a need to look wider than the traditional view of a road. To move away from focussing on increasing capacity and to consider highways as multi-modal movement corridors, providing for journeys by electric and hydrogen powered vehicles, bus, and all forms of active travel. This will include also planning for infrastructure to support the uptake of zero emission vehicles. TfSE is currently undertaking work on an EV charging strategy for the region.
- 10.4 There is an increasing likelihood we will need to rely on digital connectivity, and 4G, broadband and emerging 5G connectivity will provide the foundations for many new technologies and associated services that will both change the nature of future travel demand and in some instances reduce the need to travel.
- 10.5 Issues surrounding Smart Motorways need to be resolved to prioritise safety, and until this can be assured TfSE support the current pause to the programme. There are other emerging technologies such as connected and autonomous vehicles that could improve the capacity of the network where this is specifically required. Consideration should also be given to

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the opportunities to trial new technologies within the managed environment of smart motorways.

- 10.6 Data that is used or collected within this new technological environment must be shared, in order that the whole transport system may benefit and continuously improve.
- 10.7 It is vital that planning for RIS3 takes account of and maximises the benefits from these changes and opportunities, and that the programme can adapt to new and emerging technologies.

**Transport for the South East
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