

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

Date of meeting: **29 January 2024**

By: **Lead Officer, Transport for the South East**

Title of report: **Development of a Regional Centre of Excellence**

Purpose of report: **To provide an update on work to deliver a Regional Centre of Excellence.**

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***RECOMMENDATIONS:***

**The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to note the progress with the development of the TfSE Regional Centre of Excellence.**

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**1. Introduction**

1.1 This report provides an update on the progress in delivering a Regional Centre of Excellence (RCoE).

**2. Background**

2.1 In February 2022, the Levelling Up White Paper set out proposals for Regional Centres of Excellence to be established. Subsequently, the Department for Transport have set out expectations that Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) take responsibility for developing and operating Centres of Excellence in their region, to provide bespoke support to Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to help them deliver ‘clear project pipelines and comprehensive strategies to improve local transport for people and reduce carbon emissions’.

2.2 For 2023/24, Transport for the South East (TfSE) allocated £250,000 to develop a RCoE , after the roadmap was agreed by the Partnership Board in March 2023. A permanent Project Manager was recruited, dedicated to this workstream.

2.3 Since August 2023, TfSE have been working with Arup as part of the Technical Call Off consortium contract, to deliver the RCoE

2.4 May 2024 will see a web based platform established, to host resources, tools, webinars and several other support methods to improve capacity and capability for the region. A key element of the first phase of delivery will be the delivery of a chat function on the platform, enabling knowledge sharing on a self access basis.

**3. Technical Call Off Contract**

3.1 At the March 2023 Partnership Board meeting, Board members agreed to delegate responsibility to undertake the procurement exercise to the Lead Officer, in

consultation with the Chair.

3.2 The procurement process commenced on 03 May 2023 when the brief was issued in the form of an invitation to tender (ITT) via a further competition conducted under the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework agreement and following the accountable body procurement rules. Board members can request a copy of the ITT from the TfSE secretariat.

3.3 At 03 July 2023 Partnership Board meeting, it was agreed that the consortium bid of Steer and its supply chain partners would be awarded the contract of work. Arup were appointed as the consultancy resource for the Regional Centre of Excellence.

#### **4. Regional Centre of Excellence Progress Update**

4.1 The RCoE project consists of five separate Tasks, which are outlined in the Appendix 1. Task 1 to confirm Alignment and Prioritisation was completed end of Spetmber, and Task 2 to complete detailed Planning and Engagement was delivered at the end of December 2023. This included delivery of **Summary Report** outlining details of all findings from engagement to date and a **Management Plan**, outlining how the future RCoE will be managed at a high level.

4.2 Appendix 2, provides an overview of progress to date based on the ourcome from Task 1 and 2.

#### **5. Governance**

5.1 One of the key tasks for the set up of a RCoE was to establish a governance structure. Initially, the intention was to have two groups established: a steering group, and a user group. It was agreed that as the stakeholders would largely be the same, that these would be combined, with an option for some of the user testing to be circulated wider than the members who would sit on the steering group.

5.2 The governance model was updated to highlight the role of the Transport Strategy Working Group as well as the more direct input from the Advisory Panel into the work of the RCoE delivery team. A diagram summarising these governance arrangements is included in Appendix 3.

5.3 We recognise the importance of the governance model being able to evolve, and for members to change as appropriate. The Steering Group will be utilised most during the development and implementation phase, and will become less frequent during its existence, but used as a feedback mechanism.

#### **6. Stakeholder engagement**

6.1 There is a desire for the RCoE to be co-designed with LTAs and the DfT to ensure that the content is appropriate, supported and makes good use of the existing tools and guidance available at a national and local level.

6.2 Since mobilisation of the technical call off contract, TfSE and Arup have held one workshop on 11 September 2023, to ensure that the roadmap remains fit for purpose, and to validate the next steps.

6.3 One of the recurring requests from LTAs was the need for the RCoE platform to provide access to academics. To that end TfSE hosted a Regional Universities meeting, to understand their level of support for an RCoE, and what they may be able to input in terms of their capacity and capability. A survey was then issued to all members of the group, to understand what skills they have that would be of benefit for the platform. We only received one submission, so further assessment will need to be undertaken to further understand their specialist skills areas.

6.4 Thirteen 1-2-1s have been held with the LTAs who sit on the steering group, to discuss the key components, structure, functionality, and partners for the Regional Centre of Excellence. The outputs of these discussions have been collated and utilised to form a specification for a digital consultant to understand what options are feasible for all of the essential requests from LTAs.

6.5 The first Steering Group meeting was held on 13 December, and the Terms of Reference were agreed. The group were presented with the confirmed outputs from the engagement to date, and further clarity offered via Miro Board. It was noted that the subsequent meeting would be held in January, with a request to consider their data gaps and be able to present this at the next meeting.

## **7. Summary report**

6.1 As part of Task 2, Arup were required to develop a summary report to outline the scope of requirements for the Regional Centre of Excellence. The report summarises the findings of all stakeholder engagement to date. A summary of this report is presented in Appendix 2.

## **8. Management of the platform**

8.1 The initial RCoE's operating processes and principles have been set out in the Management Plan. This includes: outline of processes that will need to be covered throughout the different stages (Stage 1 - Planning, Stage 2 – Launch, Stage 3 – Initial Management, Stage 4 - Long-term management) such as sponsorship, platform development, managing and uploading content, running training, events and physical collaboration, communications and promotion, monitoring usage and KPIs, and Stakeholder engagement and governance and capturing user needs.

8.2 The management plan also includes details of: staff roles and responsibilities, communications and engagement, data strategy, partnership approach and engagement and success measurement (Key Performance Indicators).

8.3 This management plan can be shared upon request.

## **9. Next steps**

9.1 The findings from the recent engagement activity will be used to produce a digital specification for the web platform. This will commence the the building of the initial virtual platform, including testing via the user group. Task 3 will also begin and involve research on options for physical locations to provide in person training, conferences and events, and to further knowledge sharing.

9.2 Surveys will be circulated to LTAs in early 2024, to begin capturing capability gaps, so that resources and training can be developed and provided as part of the first iteration of the platform.

9.3 The intention is to have the first phase of the platform ready for launch in May 2024. This will form Task 4, which will see the launch and management of virtual platform, including launch plan, launch event, activities, monitoring and evaluation, new content.

9.4 As the project develops and moves into the management phase, future funding arrangements, including establishing future funding will be considered and work will be undertaken to put in place a procurement framework.

## **10. Fiscal benefits**

10.1 A key ambition of the Regional Centre of Excellence is to deliver economies of scale, through sharing of resources and best practice to create consistency and remove duplication. We are working with all STBs to understand what is available for us to signpost to and what they will be developing in future that will be of benefit to our local transport authorities, but doesn't come with an additional cost to us. This demonstrates our conscientious attitude towards tax payers money and making best use of existing resources.

10.2 One of our key performance indicators will be to measure the cost savings for local authorities as a result of the centre of excellence. These could include the provision of licences, reduction in training costs, access to expertise, and knowledge sharing, to name a few.

10.3 In addition to the examples above, work will be ongoing throughout the life of the Regional Centre of Excellence to plug the gaps in data. This will help to improve business cases and evidence bases for local authorities, but also means that all our local authorities will be working from the same version of the truth, which should lend itself to improved joined up thinking.

10.4 We will be happy to share these results with local authorities to help them make the case for continuing their local contributions to TfSE.

## **11. Conclusions**

11.1 As a co-design approach was adopted, extensive engagement has happened to date to ensure that the RCoE is being developed and consequently delivered in line with LTAs expectations and needs.

11.2 January 2024 will see the project into Task 3, which is the build and test segment of the platform's delivery. This will ensure that come launch in May 2024, the platform will be familiar, and robust.

11.3 Board Members are recommended to note progress with the development of a Regional Centre of Excellence.

**RUPERT CLUBB**

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# Project Context

## Key Tasks, Sub-tasks & Milestones



## Appendix 2

### Overview of summary report, delivered as part of Task 2.

#### Objectives

There was general confirmation that the Regional Centre of Excellence will: be housed in the virtual platform and supporting networks; enable the cross-sharing of knowledge across geographies and respond to the unique needs and requirements of the South East transport authorities.

#### Components of the virtual RCoE

It has been identified that the RCoE Virtual Platform should consist of 14 components including: home/about pages, chat forum, space to foster external relationships, webinars, resources, qualifications/courses, events, area for those new to the sector, key tools repository, case studies, funding/procurement, news/blogs, consultations and data.

Engagement during Task 2 highlighted that the case studies, chat forums and space for those new to the sector are particularly important components to develop and are priorities. Additionally, the chat forum should be set up in a way that is a safe space to encourage open discussion amongst the core users, LTAs.

Prioritisation of the components will be undertaken at January's Board, which will be necessary to enable the digital consultants to lay out the platform appropriately.

It was noted that for each of the components to be successful, all local transport authorities will be required to provide input.

#### Functionality of the web-based platform

The functionality requirements have five confirmed principles. These are for the platform to have restricted access rather than open access and for it to be collaborative, modular, encourage both self-learning and learning from others and manageable into the long term, beyond the support from Arup. Engagement with LTAs also confirmed that it should be simple, intuitive, and also visually engaging.

#### Prioritised Skills for the RCoE platform

It has been highlighted that skills focused on in the RCoE will need to link to themes from the DfT objectives. How skills relate to skills maps held by the professional institutes should also be considered.

As part of skills model development, there will be a need to create an expertise matrix/heatmap of skills amongst the LTAs to be used for Training Needs Analysis (TNA) activities and to determine key priorities.

Some of the initial requirements for skills to be focused on in the RCoE are as follows: considering unique modes such as freight, decarbonisation/carbon assessment, EVs, modelling, business cases, finance/procurement, active and sustainable transport, scheme delivery, and policy making including LTPs in particular.

## Users and Partners

One of the key elements of the RCoE is the potential external partners to be involved with the RCoE, and their level of involvement and access to the virtual platform. This has been discussed at length during the first round of the project team's 1:1 discussions with LTA officers.

The key types of users and partners are as follows:

- **Sponsor:** Department for Transport and TfSE
- **Core users:** Key RCoE users (TfSE and LTAs) and that will obtain most value and make collaborative contributions to aid its success. Core users may have restricted access areas only for themselves. Represented via Steering Group and also SOG/Partnership Board.
- **Key partners:** Interested in the RCoE and will obtain some value from it and will actively contribute to providing specialist/targeted support. Includes professional institutions (CIHT, TPC, ICE, CECA), key Universities, Active Travel England, National Highways and Network Rail, and other STBs.
- **Other stakeholders:** A degree of interest in the RCoE and should be aware of its existence but will not actively contribute to it or use it on a regular basis. Includes elected members, transport operator groups (RDG and CPT), business groups (e.g. Chambers of Commerce) and Interest/User Groups (e.g. Sustrans, Transport Focus).

Through round 1 of the 1:1 LTA discussions it was identified that the RCoE platform could enable two-way relationships between LTAs and the identified key partners such as via sharing of information and developing joint solutions to address any skills gaps.

A high level plan for engaging with partners and other stakeholders moving forward has been developed.

Access management processes will need to be managed through the RCoE Steering Group, to ensure there is no conflict of interest or risk to commercial sensitive information.

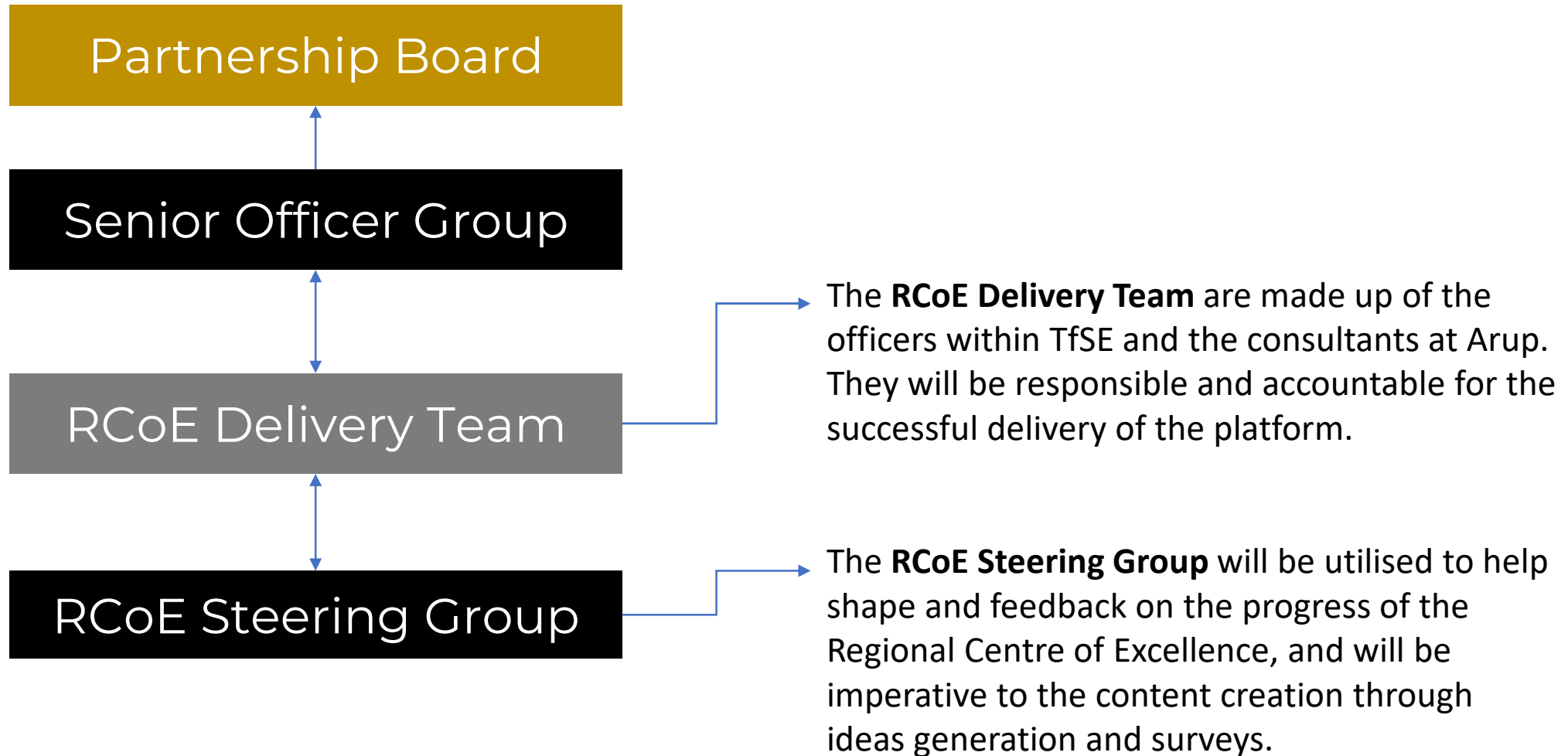
## Technology

As part of LTA discussions, potential technology options for the virtual platform were discussed alongside ideas of other solutions that could be integrated into this. Key updates are as follows:

- Miro/other whiteboard providers viewed positively
- The simpler the technology that is used the better
- GIS/Mapping technology are useful
- PowerBI functionality could be considered
- Moodle has strong capabilities but not the best for navigation and Teams is functional but does not have the best interface for RCoE and has several access issues.



# Regional Centre of Excellence Governance Model



# Regional Centre of Excellence Governance Model

## RCoE governance

- The RCoE Steering Group also incorporates a User Group with representation from LTAs
- Forums provide opportunities for possible partnership working

