

House of Commons Transport Select Committee Call for Evidence on Strategic Transport Objectives

Response from Transport for the South East

1. Introduction

1.1 Transport for the South East (TfSE) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee's Call for Evidence on the Government's Strategic Transport Objectives.

1.2 This is a draft officer response that will be presented to the TfSE Partnership Board in October 2023 for them to agree. A further iteration may therefore follow.

1.3 TfSE is a sub-national transport body (STB) for the South East of England, 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. We have a [30-year transport strategy](#) in place which carries real weight and influence and will shape government decisions about where, when and how to invest in our region to 2050. The Secretary of State has confirmed that they will have regard to our strategy in developing new policy. We work closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) to provide advice to the Secretary of State and our ambition is to become a statutory body with devolved powers over key strategic transport issues.

1.4 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.

1.5 Our [Strategic Investment Plan \(SIP\) for South East England](#) provides a framework for investment in strategic transport infrastructure, services, and regulatory interventions in the coming three decades. The plan provides a framework for delivering our Transport Strategy, which:

- is a blueprint for investment in the South East;
- shows how we will achieve our ambitions for the South East;
- is owned and delivered in partnership;
- is a regional plan with evidenced support, to which partners can link their own local strategies and plans – a golden thread that connects policy at all levels;
- provides a sequenced plan of multi-modal investment packages that are place based and outcome focused; and
- examines carbon emissions impacts as well as funding and financing options.

The plan presents a compelling case for action for investors, including government departments – notably the Treasury and Department for Transport (DfT) – as well as private sector investors. It is written for and on behalf of the South East's residents, communities, businesses and political representatives.

1.6 TfSE welcome this inquiry by the Select Committee into the Government's Strategic Objectives. Specifically to identify to what extent the Government takes a long-term, national and multi-modal approach to planning, maintaining and developing the country's transport needs, and what difference adoption of clear, national strategic objectives for transport could make. We trust that our response to the questions posed below provide value to the Committee.

2. (Question 1). What is your understanding of the Government's strategic transport objectives? Are they the right ones, and if not, how should they be changed?

2.1 Currently there is a lack clarity over what the Government's strategic transport objectives are. The Department for Transport's [website](#) lists the following as its priorities:

- boosting economic growth and opportunity
- building a One Nation Britain
- improving journeys
- safe, secure and sustainable transport

2.2 The website then links to an outcome delivery plan for 2021/22, where the three priority outcomes are listed as:

- Improve connectivity across the UK and grow the economy by enhancing the transport network, on time and on budget.
- Build confidence in the transport network as the country recovers from COVID-19 and improve transport users' experience, ensuring that the network is safe, reliable, and inclusive.
- Tackle climate change and improve air quality by decarbonising transport (this outcome reflects DfT's contribution to the BEIS-led cross-cutting net zero outcome).

2.3 Further strategies such as Bus Back Better, Gear Change, the Future Mobility: urban strategy, and the Road Investment Strategy also set out further priorities and objectives. These shifting objectives and outcomes often focus, with the probable exception of climate change and economic growth, on transport-specific matters. It is our view that the Government's strategic transport objectives should be focussing on wider outcomes that all government departments should be seeking to achieve including the following:

- Climate change and achieving Net Zero
- Economic growth and regeneration
- Tackling social exclusion and inequality
- Levelling up the UK
- Improving health and contributing to the wellbeing of the population

2.4 The delivery of these outcomes requires an integrated multimodal approach to transport planning that the Department for Transport is not currently organised

to realise. Currently there is too much focus on delivering modally based investment plans that limit the ability to achieve these wider outcomes.

2.5 The delivery of these outcomes also requires close partnership working between a variety of partners to enact the significant changes that are required. TfSE has successfully developed and adopted a number of thematic strategies and action plans through its Partnership Board, who have successfully worked together through consensus on securing the best possible deal for transport in the South East. This focus has been key in securing the progress that TfSE has made to date. But this process has also demonstrated how different priorities and understanding of issues can cause problems in delivery.

2.6 Throughout the work of our partnership we have observed a number of gaps in regional transport planning. These include the following:

- **Lack of a clear, multi-modal strategic direction aligned with funding and powers.** A significant learning experience from the development of our [transport strategy](#) is that at local, regional, and national level, there is a lack of a clear, multi-modal strategic direction for transport within England. The policy environment is characterised by siloed policy making, as ably articulated in the [Green Paper](#) produced by the Institution of Civil Engineers, with little in the way of strategic co-ordination. STBs have attempted to address this issue through the development of their transport strategies and investment plans. For instance, TfSE has taken a multimodal approach to develop the proposals in its [Strategic Investment Plan](#). This has included a series of [Area Studies](#), work on [freight](#), and work on [future mobility](#). Although it needs to be emphasised that where there are issues that are modally specific (e.g. capacity on the railway network), a modally specific approach is still needed as long as the resulting investment plan does not lose sight of the overarching strategic outcomes that should be sought.
- **Challenges on strategic co-ordination of priorities within and between regional areas.** TfSE understands from its collaborative work with other STBs, that the specific priorities of each region are different, even if the overall outcomes and objectives contained within transport strategies may be somewhat similar.

Strategic regional transport planning has a chequered history in England. Even within the TfSE region, there are a variety of sub-regional approaches to policy making. A notable example being that of the Solent region, where through Solent Transport there have been a variety of successes in sub-regional policy making, including securing funding for [a Future Transport Zone](#).

This is equally the case for strategic planning between regional areas. There is currently no duty for regional areas to co-operate on strategic transport and planning matters, similar in the manner to which Local Planning Authorities have a statutory duty to co-operate. Regardless of this, many STBs do collaborate on a number of thematic areas, including work on decarbonisation, freight, rural transport, electric vehicle charging

infrastructure and lately on the establishment of a series of regional centres of excellence.

- **Lack of co-ordination between strategic transport planning and the ability to deliver necessary changes.** The delivery of strategic transport planning and priorities requires close partnership working between a variety of partners to enact significant changes. TfSE has successfully developed and adopted a number of thematic strategies and action plans through its Partnership Board, who have successfully worked together through consensus on securing the best possible deal for transport in the South East. This focus has been key in securing the progress that TfSE has to date. But this process has also showed how different priorities and understanding of issues can cause problems in delivery.

A notable recent example is that of decarbonisation. The STBs are working together to understand the decarbonisation potential of a variety of different types of transport schemes and the data and approaches needed to understand this. However, even where there is consensus that decarbonisation should be achieved, this can be interpreted differently in different locations. For instance, within a larger urban area decarbonising transport can be understood to mean encouraging the use of active travel, whereas in another area the focus could be on encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles.

2.7 In summary, it is our view that the Government's transport objectives need to be focussed on achieving wider environmental, societal and economic benefits that an integrated multimodal approach to transport planning at the national, regional and local level can deliver. They need to be expressed on a consistent basis rather than shifting as new national strategy, policy and investment plans emerge. Objectives focussing on matters such as decarbonisation, economic growth, levelling up, and improving social outcomes are supported by our Partnership Board. But what is critical is the tone and direction of these objectives, which should provide a clear and consistent policy direction across all transport modes. This is what is currently missing.

3. (Question 2). How well has the Government articulated the outcomes and objectives it seeks from the country's transport network? How could this be improved, and what impact would better-defined objectives have on transport planning and investment

3.1 The most significant challenge involved in defining outcomes and objectives is coming to a common view on what these outcomes and objectives mean. As stated in our answer to Question 1, the current objectives and outcomes for transport are shifting and unclear. Good policy making should seek to achieve an overall vision for the nation and articulate transport's role within that and the outcomes that are being sought.

3.2 TfSE would welcome the creation of a national transport strategy for England that is closely linked to an overall future vision for the nations transport system. In common with Scotland's and Wales's national transport strategies, this should not identify specific projects or interventions but provide a framework for making

decisions to enable infrastructure interventions directly linked to the wider national outcomes being sought. This national strategy would provide the framework for the regional transport strategies and investment plans developed by STBs which would identify the interventions needed to address the specific challenges and opportunities in their areas.

3.3 On a more practical level, best practice on objective setting states that these should be SMART. Namely Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Bound. Doing so requires engagement and discussion with key stakeholders, including political stakeholders. Without this the result can be the formulation of objectives that do not satisfy these tests, or are not relevant to their context, and in some cases do not contain any objectives at all. For example, the Road Investment Strategy 2 contained a 'Strategic Vision' and provides some descriptions of what that vision entails, but has no objectives associated with it.

4. (Question 3). How well does the appraisal and decision-making process for new transport investment meet the Government's strategic transport objectives? How should this be improved?

4.1 The Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) process has undergone significant changes over the last 10 years, most notably with the introduction of the [TAG uncertainty toolkit](#) that requires practitioners to assess interventions against a variety of future scenarios. At a regional level, this has enabled STBs to develop their analytical frameworks support the development of business cases including those being developed by Local Transport Authorities for major transport schemes.

4.2 It is important to consider that the appraisal process is simply one part of the wider decision making process on schemes, as identified in TAG and guidance in the HM Treasury Green Book. This decision making process emphasises that appraisal simply supports the development of a business case for any new transport investment in the development of major transport investment, such as major schemes. This is established in [the Department for Transport's Business Case Guidance](#).

4.3 Within this framework, strategic objectives align most closely with the Strategic Dimension section of the business case. The practical challenge is aligning relevant strategic priorities to the scheme being appraised. For instance, major bus infrastructure improvements may align well with Bus Back Better, whilst major active travel schemes may align well with Gear Change.

4.4 Whilst in a practical sense this does not deter schemes from being developed and potentially funded, the result is that the strategic cases for schemes are not being considered on a consistent basis. In the absence of over-arching Government transport objectives, each scheme is considered on its individual merits as a modally specific scheme, as opposed to a transport scheme potentially delivering wider societal, environmental or economic benefits.

5. (Question 4). How should wider economic, environmental and social impacts be appraised and valued, including when the gains will largely be felt in policy areas other than transport?

5.1 Whilst the recent changes to the Treasury [Green Book](#) have provided a shift in thinking, it is important to note that transport is an enabler, and so the current [Transport Analysis Guidance](#) (TAG) is often too narrow to fully capture the wider benefits of schemes. This is particularly the case where they are facilitating development and the provision of new homes and employment opportunities. In these instances the use of a 'Strategic Economic Narrative' to join up the traditional strategic and economic dimensions of the business cases can be useful to clearly set out the case for a scheme. This can be supplemented with additional (non-TAG) analysis and appraisal to capture the wider benefits that will be realised by the housing and employment opportunities facilitated by the scheme, which can often differ from the more traditional definition of "dependant development".

5.2 In their response to the Green Book Review, DfT published [Capturing local context in transport appraisal](#). The use of a wider range of appraisal tools and techniques such as those described in that document should be encouraged, where appropriate. The officials assessing business cases should be open to considering these alternative assessments. Decision makers should follow the principles of the Green Book revisions and need to be made aware of the entirety of the five case business case process, and not overly focus on just the benefit cost ratio (BCR) within the economic case.

6. (Question 5). How can longer-term certainty in planning be achieved in order to promote greater private sector investment from a range of sources?

6.1 The most important consideration here is that funding needs to be planned and delivered on a longer term basis. This is needed to give those responsible delivering and potentially funding schemes the certainty that is needed to warrant significant investment over time. Currently, funding for different modes of transport is allocated as follows:

- Rail: Control Periods of 5 years
- Highways (Strategic): Road Investment Strategy periods of 5 years
- Highways (Local): Annual allocations through Integrated Transport Block, Road Maintenance funding allocations, and local authority own spend, with occasional funding bids
- Buses: Allocated through BSIP, but not to all local authorities, who may decide to support bus services in their own way
- Active travel: Rounds of the Active Travel Fund
- Other time-limited one-off funding bids such as the Levelling Up Fund, Housing Infrastructure Fund, the Safer Roads Fund, and the Future Transport Zones

6.2 The [National Infrastructure Strategy](#) identifies major national scale schemes to be delivered, and the funding required to do so. However, this does not account for necessary improvements to local infrastructure that are required to complement these larger scale schemes and which are critical to the people and places where they will be introduced.

6.3 This picture of a fractured funding landscape with relatively short-term funding allocations discourages effective long term planning and this in turn discourages private sector investment. What is needed to address this is longer

term pipelines of funding that would allow regional and local areas to develop longer term scheme delivery plans. TfSE's [Strategic Investment Plan \(SIP\)](#) provides a framework for investment in strategic transport infrastructure, services, and regulatory interventions in the coming three decades. It includes a section on how the interventions within it can be paid for including an exploration of approaches that seek to monetise a share of the specific value that projects deliver for beneficiaries, which in turn makes them more of an attractive proposition for potential funders.

6.4 Consideration needs to the introduction of regional funding allocations, that enable a move away from a ring-fenced, siloed modal based approach to transport infrastructure funding to one based on an integrated and multimodal approach. The longer-term funding settlements enjoyed by Mayoral Combined Authorities provide certainty and confidence required to invest in in-house transport planning and design capacity and develop pipelines of projects and procurement that delivers the best outcomes and best value. The model that currently operates in London and the Mayoral Combined Authorities and needs to be extended nationally.

7. (Question 6). How effectively is strategic transport planning and investment coordinated across and between transport modes, including with reference to achieving modal shift?

7.1 Throughout its work, TfSE engages proactively with a number of stakeholders responsible for the management of national transport networks including National Highways, Network Rail and Sustrans . In our experience, all our key stakeholders are committed to working in partnership and across different modes of transport, and when strategies and projects interface, we try and work positively together. An example of this is the way in which National Highways have sought to involve STBs in the development of their [Route Strategies](#) and their [Strategic Road Network Initial Report](#). We have had a similar level of engagement with Network Rail on the development of their investment plans and both these national network operators have been closely involved the development of our Transport Strategy and Strategic investment Plan. However, it is also true to say that this practice is the exception rather than the rule as a consequence of how current governance arrangements operate.

7.2 The policy making and funding landscape across a number of key modes of transport in the South East, is summarised in Table 7.1. This demonstrates how the current governance landscape encourages a siloed approach to the development of policy, with consideration generally limited to that of specific interchange points. A notable example being railway stations, which integrate multiple modes in the same space.

Table 7.1 – Summary of key policies related to specific modes at a national, regional, and local level within the South East of England

	National Level	Region and Sub-Region	Local
Highways	Priorities and funding for National Highways established through Road Investment Strategy process (5 year plan and allocation)	TfSE Regional Transport Strategy establishing strategic priorities	Local Transport Plans revised when deemed appropriate by the Local Transport Authority Annual funding allocation for road improvements and maintenance. Major Scheme funding bids for major projects.
Active Travel	Gear Change strategy for walking and cycling	TfSE Active Travel Strategy	Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plans Annual funding allocation for road improvements and maintenance Major Scheme funding bids for major projects Occasional Active Travel Fund bids
Bus	Bus Back Better Strategy Revenue funding for specific initiatives, notably National Concessionary Bus Pass, the current National Single Fare Scheme Bus Service Operator Grant	Bus Back Better Support Programme	Bus Service Improvement Plans and associated funding Annual funding allocation for infrastructure improvements Revenue support for socially necessary services

	National Level	Region and Sub-Region	Local
Rail	Priorities and funding for Network Rail established through the Control Period process (5 year plans and allocations) Awarding rail franchises	TfSE Transport Strategy and Strategic Investment Plan establishing strategic priorities	Community Rail Partnerships
Freight	Future of Freight Plan	TfSE Freight Strategy and Regional Freight Forum	Freight considerations in Local Transport Plans.
Ports	General Guidance issued by Maritime and Coastguard Agency	TfSE Freight Strategy and Regional Freight Forum	Local planning and highways guidance and decisions as relevant to individual ports
Airports	General Aviation Policy Framework adopted by the Civil Aviation Authority	TfSE Regional Transport Strategy establishing strategic priorities	Local planning and highways guidance and decisions as relevant to individual airports

7.3 Achieving modal shift is recognised by transport planners as necessary to achieving the sector’s Net Zero ambitions. However, to date only one national policy document makes direct reference to the need to achieve modal shift, whilst not being mode-specific in its approach. This the Transport Decarbonisation Plan. The current modal-centric approach to policy development discourages consideration of modal shift as a realistic policy proposition.

7.4 TfSE’s Strategic Investment Plan and Transport Strategy have been developed in a manner that seeks to co-ordinate the disparate national policies and objectives with local policies and plans. As shown in Figure 1, they provide the golden thread between national and local policy and strategy.

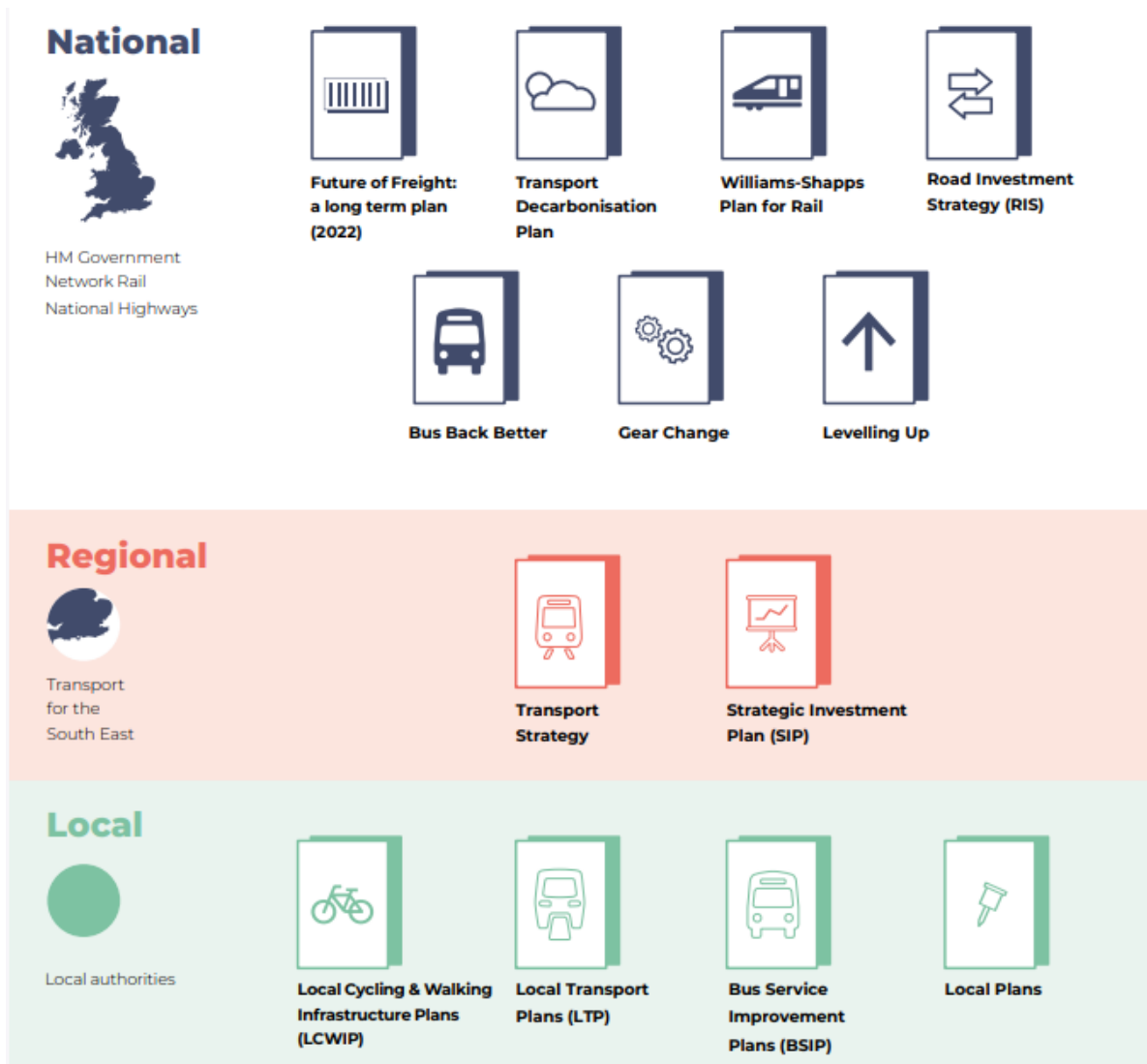


Figure 1 - Alignment of TfSE's regional strategies with national and local planning policies

7.5 Increasingly STBs are working together on various thematic work. An example of this is in our joint working on sharing best practice on cutting transport emissions. By sharing experience, technical approach and knowledge we're able to better support our local partners in their approach to delivering the UK's net zero targets for transport. Other areas when joint working is taking place include rail, freight, rural transport, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the development of a common analytical framework.

8. (Question 7). How could planning for transport infrastructure across government and coordination of policy (for example, with policy on energy, digital or planning) be made more coherent and streamlined?

8.1 TfSE is of the view that the co-ordination of transport policy requires a national transport strategy for England. In common with Scotland's and Wales's national transport strategies, this should not identify specific projects or interventions but provide a framework for making decisions to enable infrastructure interventions directly linked to the wider national outcomes being sought. This national strategy would provide the framework for the regional transport strategies

and investment plans developed by STBs. These would identify the interventions needed to address the specific challenges and opportunities in their areas.

8.2 The transport strategies and investment plans that have already been delivered by the STBs demonstrate the merits of a regional approach to transport planning. They have enabled the development coherent multi-modal transport strategies that serve the needs of the people, business and places within their areas.

8.3 With regards to interfaces with other policy areas, TfSE is of the view that the following policy areas have a significant interface with transport policy at all levels of government:

- Planning policy (Department for Levelling Up and Communities)
- Digital and communications policy (Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport)
- Economic policy (HM Treasury, Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology, and Department for Business and Trade)
- Levelling Up Agenda (Department for Levelling Up and Communities)
- Climate Change and Net Zero policy (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs)

8.4 This a non-exhaustive list, as transport touches every aspect of life and modern society. Links with other outcomes in addition to those above can include equity, healthcare, social isolation.

8.5 In developing any objectives for new strategies, standard practice is to undertake a review of existing policies to ensure compliance. This has been standard in Local Transport Plans and Local Plans for many years, as compliance with key documents gives significant weight to those strategies and the schemes contained within them. This is especially the case for Local Plans, which are expected to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework. However, these are examples of 'integrating upwards' where local policies are expected to comply with national policies.

8.5 This is critical for local authorities as it enables a 'gold thread' of objectives to flow from local policies and link individual schemes to regional and national policy. This improves the robustness of local policies and the chances of securing funding for schemes developed to give effect to them.

8.6 What is required is a more is lateral integration of policy objectives across government departments to ensure that policies are mutually beneficial to each other. Enabling this in a manner that is useful for setting transport objectives requires new ways to develop policy that seek collaboration across government departments. One such example is [Triple Access Planning](#), which seeks to achieve future sustainable urban accessibility through the transport system (physical mobility), the land-use system (spatial proximity) and the telecommunications system (digital connectivity); together constituting a Triple Access System (TAS).

8.7 Another potential approach is the use of [systems thinking](#). Used extensively by the Government Office for Science in their Foresight projects, this enables policy makers to understand the different interfaces that the policy area has with others,

and the nature of that relationship. Undertaking a systems mapping exercise and understanding how different policy interventions are likely to interact with different elements of this system should be a necessary part of objective setting and policy making in the future.

9. (Question 8). How effectively is strategic transport planning and investment coordinated between national, devolved, regional and local government and other public bodies? Do the current division and distribution of powers help or hinder?

9.1 TfSE has always been clear about the role that STBs should play in delivering better transport outcomes for regions in England. Figure 1 illustrates the golden thread between national, regional and local transport planning provided by TfSE's Transport Strategy and Strategic Investment Plan. There are a number of benefits that STBs bring:

- Delivering local democratic accountability and speaking with one voice on behalf of their constituent authorities on the transport investment requirements of their regions;
- Developing regional evidence bases ensures that the differing needs and opportunities within each region are reflected in STB's transport strategies. This enables Government to deepen the use of a programme approach in confirming the allocation of funds, strengthening the linkage between plans prepared by LTAs and those developed and delivered by national infrastructure bodies such as Network Rail and National Highways.
- Delivering benefits to transport users through coordinated action to accelerate the delivery of transport infrastructure improvements. An example of this is the Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategies that have been developed by STBs. These seek to accelerate the roll out of a comprehensive network charging infrastructure through better coordination of individual local authority activity.

9.2 Should an English national transport strategy and regional funding allocations be established these would provide a policy and funding framework for the regional multimodal transport strategies produced by STBs. These would then provide the primary mechanism for identifying and allocating funds to transport investment priorities across the country. This would present an opportunity to drive further efficiency in the system by allowing Network Rail and National Highways to focus on maintaining an effective and safe network with the strategic investment planning work undertaken by STBs. Under this proposal LTAs would continue to produce local transport plans setting out how the needs of local communities were to be met in their areas.

9.3 In order for such benefits to be fully realised and ensure that regional transport strategies are delivered effectively, it is important that further consideration is given to providing STBs the powers and duties as set out in the Transport Act (2008) at the appropriate time. Currently, the only STB with statutory status is Transport for the North. Statutory status would provide STBs with the powers and responsibilities that would be needed to fully deliver their transport strategies and strategic investment plans. [Ends]