

Report to: Partnership Board –Transport for the South East

Date of meeting: 13 May 2024

By: Chief Officer, Transport for the South East

Title of report: Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Plan 2024/25

Purpose of report: To provide the board with the Communications and Engagement Plan for 2024/25

RECOMMENDATION:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to consider and approve the Communications and Engagement plan 2024/25.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Communication and Engagement Plan 2024/25 provides information on the audiences and stakeholders who we need to inform and influence. It also outlines our engagement activity over the last twelve months, as well as our communications and engagement targets for 2024/25.

2. Contents

2.1 The plan contains the following:

- The Communications Context
- The Role of Communications and Engagement at Transport for the South East (TfSE)
- How we manage our relationships
- Understanding our audiences
- Our communication channels
- Current engagement
- Parliamentary representation and support
- Key interactions with MPs 2023/24
- Communications and Engagement Strategy
- Summary of activity
- Measuring success

3. Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 In conclusion, the plan shows a clear strategy to further build on our communications and engagement successes. It also outlines some realistic targets around future communications and engagement activities.

3.2 The Partnership Board is asked to consider and approve the plan. The board will continue to receive updates on all communication and engagement activity throughout the year.

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Minister for Transport, DfT

Communications & Engagement Plan 2024/25

The Communications Context

Building awareness and advocacy

Awareness of the TfSE brand among key audiences has grown significantly over the last year following an ongoing focused programme of communications and engagement activity. There's been an uplift in social media engagement and follower numbers, chiefly due to using audio and video content on our channels. Our MP engagement has seen renewed awareness of TfSE.

Supporting regional and national prosperity

Investment in the south east's transport infrastructure is assumed by many to be far higher than the reality. It is common for the south east to be included with London, and improvements to London transport infrastructure can skew understanding of transport investment in the south east.

This provides a real challenge for TfSE, for example there are high levels of deprivation in some coastal communities compounded by poor transport links. Levelling up is vital for the south east. Our messaging has increasingly focused on the vital part the south east plays in boosting the national economy, along with the fact it is the county's main international gateway.

Local authority financial pressure

A combination of demand for services, notably in social care coupled with budget pressures mean some difficult choices will need to be made over the coming years. We know our local authority partners are having to do more with less and are facing some tough spending decisions. Against this backdrop, we must continue to demonstrate our worth and value to these partners.

A unique partnership

TfSE is a partnership with strong links to a wide and growing range of other groups and stakeholders. From a comms and engagement perspective, this is both a challenge and a real opportunity. Our region is geographically diverse. Coastal towns and cities, rural communities and international ports all with differing transport needs and distinct connectivity challenges. TfSE has enabled our region to speak with one voice to government.

The Communications Context

Based on this context, we can make the following informed decisions about our communications and engagement activity:

Insight-driven comms

Our communications and engagement activity should be insight-driven wherever possible, using evidence and insight to prioritise activity which delivers most benefit in achieving our objectives.

Assumptions about the south east

We need to continue to educate local, regional and national audiences about our area and the challenges and opportunities from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

Value of the south east to the national exchequer

We must continue to be clear on the value that investment in the south east's transport network can add – not just to the region but to the nation.

Shifting attitudes towards climate change

While STBs exist first and foremost to drive economic growth, it must be clear on the social and environmental impacts. This includes reducing the harmful impacts of transport and to creating a better, more sustainable future.

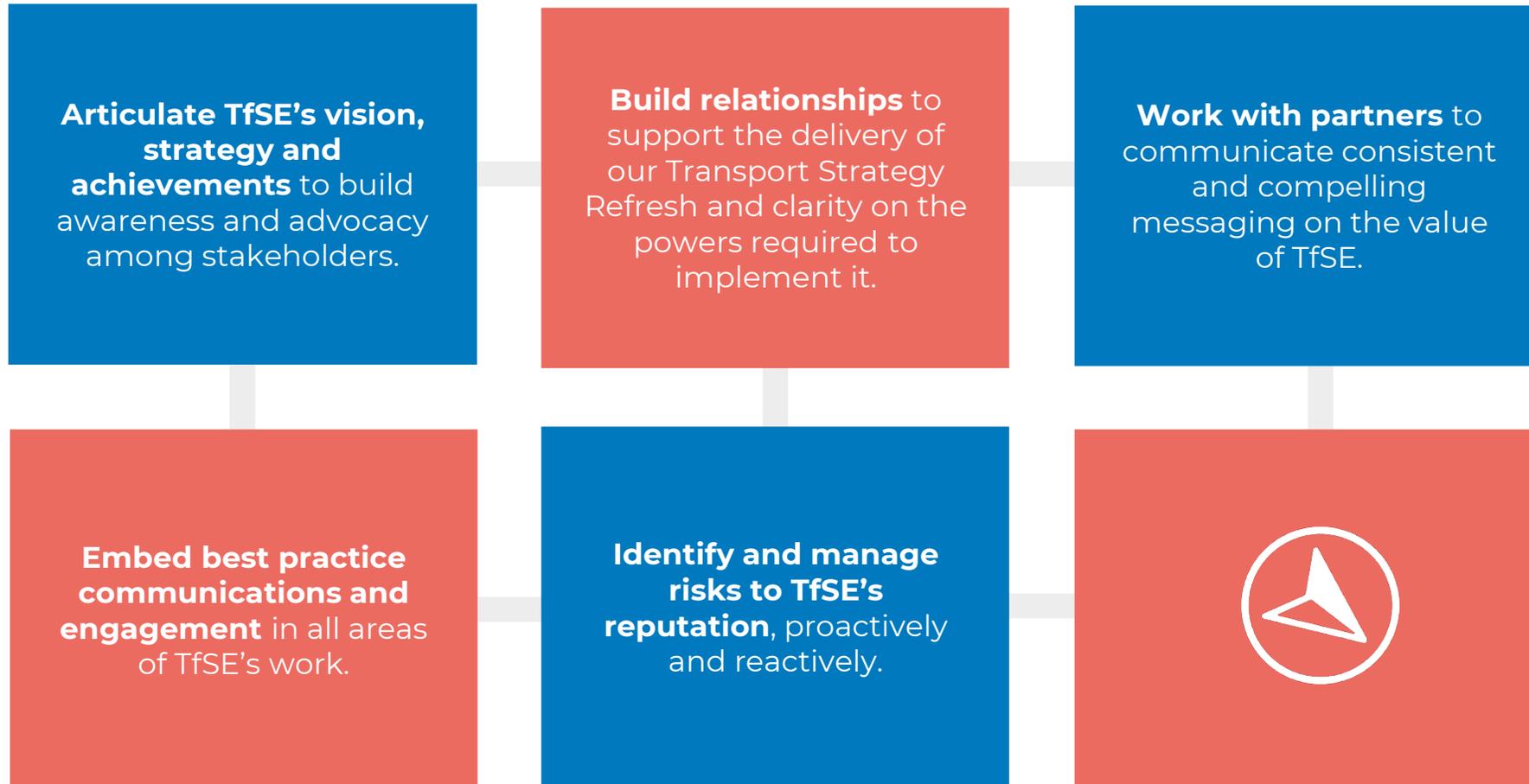
Speaking with one voice

We need to highlight the strength of consensus that TfSE enables and provide our partners and stakeholders with clear, timely and relevant communications so they can share a consistent story about TfSE.

Demonstrating our worth to partners and the public

In these difficult financial times, we must show to our funders, partners and taxpayers, the ongoing necessity of our work and the value for money we deliver.

The Role of Communications and Engagement at Transport for the South East

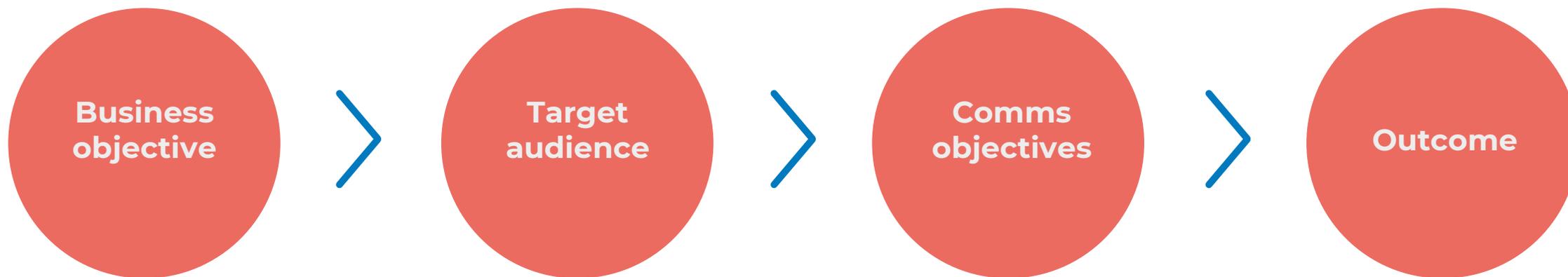


Managing our relationships

Transport for the South East was established in 2017. It is a partnership made up of 16 local authorities plus representatives of district and borough authorities, protected landscapes, and national delivery agencies.

It is a complex environment from a communications perspective, with audiences and influences spanning every level from local residents and small businesses to MPs and government ministers.

We will manage our external relationships through effective strategic communications: establishing clear business objectives, mapping relevant stakeholders, and developing targeted engagement plans with defined outcomes.



Understanding our audiences

Mutually productive and supportive relationships exist with our **constituent authorities and other organisations** – though awareness does not always extend far beyond those officers and elected members with whom we hold direct relationships.

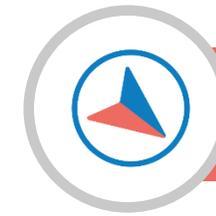
Considerable effort has gone into growing our relationships with officers and members in our **46 district and borough authorities** – but more needs to be done to share our vision and to highlight the vital role we can play in the south east.

Similarly, strong relationships have been built with key individuals at **transport industry** partners including owners, operators and the supply chain. These continue to be robust.

Engagement with **parliamentary stakeholders** has been revisited with a fresh approach based around what our Strategic Investment Plan means for their local constituencies. We have had productive meetings with MPs across the region who are keen to support TfSE however they can.

Awareness of TfSE among local, regional and national **media** needs to be improved but this can only be achieved with the right accessible content. Trade press awareness of TfSE is relatively high but sometimes difficult to track.

Relatively low levels of awareness among **residents** in the region, though there remains a small group of engaged campaigners. Awareness in the regional **business** community remains mixed but will be improved upon with initiatives such as the Freight Forum.



Constituent authorities



Partners



Residents



Businesses



MPs and Govt.



Media

Our Channels

Engage360	Connections	The TfSE Podcast	Social Media
<p>Engage360 is an add-on to our engagement platform Tractivity.</p> <p>TfSE have opted to use Engage360 as part of our Transport Strategy Refresh.</p> <p>The platform will be used to encourage specific groups to engage with us, in collaboration with the piece of work.</p> <p>The sub-brand 'Your Voices' has been created to work hand-in-hand with the platform.</p>	<p>We produce a monthly newsletter called Connections, that goes out to our entire stakeholder database, which consists of over 4,000 delegates.</p> <p>Connections contains our latest work, what's coming up and any new announcements.</p>	<p>We established The TfSE Podcast in September 2023.</p> <p>The podcast talks about all things transport, our ongoing work, and upcoming technologies.</p> <p>It is also a chance for our audience to hear from industry experts.</p> <p>The aim of the podcast is to reach a more diverse audience and educate people on the challenges and opportunities the transport industry faces.</p>	<p>TfSE are active on Facebook, LinkedIn and X.</p> <p>We post new content weekly. This content includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- News- Past work- Future work- Events- Awareness days

Current Engagement

We maintain engagement with over 4000 individuals and around 2000 organisations through our stakeholder management system.

As part of this we manage numerous stakeholder groups ranging from our Partnership Board to technical steering groups and our Transport Forum.

Last year we conducted a review of our Transport Forum which led us to refresh the format and include the following:

- Bi-annual digital engagement events
- Bi-annual in person Transport Forum meetings
- Expanded membership

Over 150 people attended our annual Connecting the South East event in October 2023.

Contact with our wider stakeholders is conducted through our monthly 'Connections' newsletter.

Social media engagement (a combination of likes, retweets and comments) are high compared with similar organisations.

The majority of our engagement in 2024/25 will be focused on the development of our **Transport Strategy Refresh**:

- We have created the sub-brand "Your Voices" to tie together our engagement work.
- We have formed 4 new Transport Strategy Refresh Working Groups, bringing together experts from a range of fields to advise and guide our strategy development.
- We're placing particular focus on our work with groups who may often feel excluded from the transport network.
- In line with our vision for a network that meets the needs of people and places, we want to increase the public awareness of TfSE.
- As part of this we have a new online engagement platform and are focusing on citizen engagement during the development of our strategy, to encourage co-design and a sense of ownership of our vision.

Parliamentary representation and support

Refreshed relationships

Starting in July 2023, we undertook a fresh set of engagement activity with MPs in the TfSE region. This resulted in productive virtual meetings with MPs and/or their office staff. We have improved our MP communication channels to allow us to reach out more effectively to MPs to attend future parliamentary events.

New constituencies

Following a 2023 review by the Boundary Commission, there have been boundary changes made to some constituencies in the south east, along with four new constituencies created. This means parliamentary representation in the TfSE area is boosted by four seats, bringing the total to seventy-five. Four new constituencies means we can start afresh with the elected MPs to ensure we build a mutually beneficial relationship from the very start of their local political career.

General election

There needs to be a general election held by January 2025. We already know of a number of MPs that are standing down at this election. There will inevitably be churn and with the boundary changes gives TfSE the opportunity to build new relationships with new MPs from day one.

Ministerial opportunities

We have enjoyed positive relationships with DfT ministers, the current Minister being one of our regional MPs. The Chairman has met with all the STB sponsoring ministers since our formation sharing our thoughts on the future role of STBs and funding requirements. Following the outcome of the election TfSE will continue our approach to ministerial engagement.

Key interactions with MPs 2023/24

Meetings with MPs

We have held productive or virtual meetings with the following MPs since we began our refreshed MP engagement activity:

- Sir Roger Gale – MP for North Thanet
- Damian Green – MP for Ashford
- Penny Mordaunt – MP for Portsmouth North
- Ranil Jayawardena – MP for East Hampshire
- Tom Tugendhat – MP for Tonbridge and Malling
- Caroline Dinenage – MP for Gosport
- Huw Merriman – MP for Bexhill and Battle
- Tracey Crouch – MP for Chatham and Aylesford
- Kelly Tolhurst – MP for Rochester and Strood
- Sir Jeremy Quin – MP for Horsham

MP's representatives

We have also held meetings with the representatives from the offices of Laura Trott – MP for Sevenoaks and Clare Coutinho – MP for East Surrey. All MPs and their offices receive a copy of our monthly newsletter

Social media support from MPs

Our ongoing relationship building with MPs has helped us successfully launch the 'Your Voices' element of TfSE's Transport Strategy Refresh activity and promote our public facing survey.

A number of MPs who we have previously met have shared or promoted our survey on their social media platforms which has helped us reach tens of thousands of people across the south east.

Comms and Engagement Strategy

Business objective

Recognised and valued as the single voice for the south east's strategic transport needs

Communication & engagement objectives

- To build awareness, understanding and advocacy of who we are, what we do and the value we add.
- To work with partners and stakeholders to communicate a consistent, compelling narrative in support of our vision.
- To be recognised as a leader in promoting truly sustainable economic growth with a focus on reducing emissions.
- To build a strong alliance of advocates for statutory status from across our audiences.
- To support the refresh of our Transport Strategy.
- To develop all members of our organisation so that everyone plays their part in delivering outstanding communications and engagement activity in support of our business objectives.

Strategy

- Embrace our difference as a strength – tell the south east story to correct misconceptions and underline TfSE's value.
- Demonstrate the strength of our partnership through joined-up comms and engagement activity wherever possible.
- Develop our public communications through the lens of the region's people and businesses and their transport challenges.
- Listen, respond and explain with a human face.
- Build up a robust baseline for insight-driven comms and engagement in future.

Audiences

- Members, partners, transport operators, supply chain, residents, businesses, media, funders, MPs, government.

How

- Develop a wide-ranging programme of events and speaking opportunities to broaden awareness and advocacy.
- Increase media activity to highlight areas where TfSE is already delivering value (for example MRN.)
- Joined up communications and engagement activity with partners wherever possible.
- Provide members, partners and stakeholders with clear, consistent content and messaging to support 'speaking with one voice'.
- Brand refresh to support more effective digital communications.

Summary of Activity

Media & PR	Digital & Social media	Events	Member/partner engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look at viable options in media monitoring, so that we can view where our work has been spoken about online or in print.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aim to post on our social media platforms at least twice a week.• Make sure to engage with people and organisations to which we have clear links (sharing/ liking their posts.)• Keep up to date with any comments made on our social media platforms and make sure we reply to them within our allotted time of ten working days.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend events that are transport-focused.• Where applicable, participate in events.• Speak about different aspects of our work at a broad range of events.• Use events as a networking opportunity to build our database and hear the views of different people.• Conceive and host our TfSE conference, bringing together experts and stakeholders from across the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to build and improve engagement practices with local authority partners.• Relaunch the Transport Forum with an expanded membership, in-person and digital events.• Focus on increasing public awareness and involvement in the work of TfSE.

Measuring Success

Audience Outcomes

TfSE Members and Partners:

- ✓ Are confident speaking on behalf of TfSE and able to clearly and consistently communicate our vision, value and purpose.

Stakeholders:

- ✓ Feel informed about our work and able to advocate for us publicly and with their wider networks; recognise the value of a mutually beneficial relationship with TfSE.

MPs:

- ✓ Understand our value to the region and to their constituents and are willing to advocate for us in public and with stakeholders and colleagues on funding and powers.

Media:

- ✓ See us as a respected source of insight and comment on relevant issues and a source of news of interest to their readers/viewers.

Public:

- ✓ Are aware of TfSE, know where to find out more about us and to how engage in conversation with us.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- ❑ Increasing our reach, engagement and listens through our social media platform and The TfSE Podcast.
- ❑ Ensuring that TfSE is seen as a trusted authority regarding transport infrastructure development in the region.
- ❑ Delivering two in-person Transport Forum events with expanded representation and two digital Transport Forum events.
- ❑ Successfully launching 'Your Voices' – our Transport Strategy engagement programme of surveys and events.
- ❑ Further enhance our relationships and engagement with local transport authorities.
- ❑ Undertake a full and wide-ranging revamp of the main TfSE website to make it accessible and fit for the future for all audiences.

2024/25 targets:

	2023/24 Numbers	2024/25 Targets
Podcast	50 Average listens per episode	100 Average listens per episode
LinkedIn	Currently 1,134 followers	2,000 followers
X/Twitter	Currently 1,089 followers	2,000 followers
MP Meetings	Previously as/when	Average at least two a month*
LTA Face-To-Face Meetings	Previously as/when	At least one a month

*Look at arranging a parliamentary reception in Westminster post general election.