

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

Date of meeting: **22 July 2024**

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

Title of report: **Centre of Excellence**

Purpose of report: **To provide an update on work to deliver and launch TfSE’s Centre of Excellence.**

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***RECOMMENDATION:***

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

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**1. Introduction**

1.1 This report outlines the progress of Transport for the South East’s (TfSE) Centre of Excellence (CoE) and its progress since the previous Partnership Board.

**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 (DfT) 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 Now live, the Centre of Excellence will help users, and support DfT in their objectives:

The Centre of Excellence will support LTAs in:

- Developing effective business cases
- Developing and maintaining an effective pipeline of schemes
- Reducing the environmental impact of transport
- Updating Local Transport Plans

**3. Centre of Excellence project progress update**

3.1 The CoE project is currently being reprofiled, to reallocate the majority of remaining budget to content creation, postponing the development of a procurement framework (Task 5), based on Steering Group feedback.

**4. Governance**

4.1 A governance structure was established for the project to ensure that the CoE was co-designed with LTAs, making the content appropriate and leveraging existing tools and guidance. A Steering Group was established (Dec 2023), and has been vital to the site's development and will continue to engage on a bi-monthly basis after September, as the focus of the project shifts to content creation.

## 5. Stakeholder engagement

5.1 Extensive engagement will continue through the life of the project in various formats. A monthly newsletter will be provided for all users to update them on new content and summary of Forum engagement that takes place on the site.

5.2 The site has layers of access, to allow key partners access to specific areas, where they are able to contribute ideas and resources.

5.3 Collaboration with all seven STBs will continue to ensure that duplication is avoided, and resources and tools are shared.

## 6. Regional Capability

6.1 A survey went out to the 70 registered users (as of April 2024) of the CoE level of capability among LTA officers and their target capability. This has been used to identify skills gaps, informing the pipeline of content that is required. Current solutions that are being developed include:

- **Business case development:** drop in sessions, a toolkit for LTAs, and an FAQ document.
- **Securing Development Consent Orders:** A resource with key definitions, tips, and lived experiences from TfSE's authorities.
- **Improving sustainability and lowering carbon:** Guidance documents and case studies.

6.2 Annual surveys will continue to shape content. Outside of the survey, feedback and suggestions for new content is welcomed through the site and governance for consideration.

## 7. Management of the platform

7.1 The Management Plan outlines processes across four stages: planning, launch, initial management, and longer term management. It includes details on roles, communications, data strategy, partnership and success measures. This plan is being adopted as the standard operational approach.

## 8. Launch event

8.1 A launch event was held on 18 June, at Broadway House, London, to formally introduce the platform, demonstrate its uses, and discuss next steps.

8.2 The day also included the first training sessions for Officers. Training sessions included Healthy Living Streets, and business case development. Feedback from the event will be used to refine future support.

## **9. Site usage and feedback**

9.1 Since the site formally launched for users on 18 June, we have 127 registered users. These include local transport officers, universities, professional institutions and national agencies. We are grateful to attendees of the event and Steering Group, who have raised awareness within their organisations to support the site's success.

9.2 To date, the Chat Forum, Resources, Data Hub, and Webinars are the most accessed components. We will continue to monitor the use of all components individually, to ensure that the communication plan for the Centre of Excellence is successful in promoting new content.

## **10. Fiscal benefits**

10.1 The Centre of Excellence aims to deliver economies of scale by sharing resources and best practices, reducing duplication and saving costs for local authorities. Key performance indicators will measure these cost savings, and will be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

## **11. Conclusions**

11.1 The formal launch event for users was held on 18 June and provided two training sessions, which was perceived to be successful through feedback after the event. Since launch, the site has had 130 sign ups (12 July), and we look forward to seeing this increase over time.

11.2 The project is being reprofiled to ensure that the majority of budget is being allocated to provision of content. Provision of content from organisations that sit outside of the Technical Call Off contract will also be explored and considered.

11.3 The survey that was issued to LTAs in April 2024 identified that skills that should be prioritised for 2024 are business case development, and national plans and guidance with bespoke content now being developed to provide solutions to support these capability gaps.

11.4 Board Members are recommended to note the progress of the project.

## **RUPERT CLUBB**

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