

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: **Next Steps for Transport for the South East**

Purpose of report: **To seek the Board’s agreement on the next steps Transport for the South East should take, following the General Election.**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to agree that Transport for the South East should take these next steps:

- (1) Seek the views of Local Transport Authorities and other partners on the future direction of travel for Transport for the South East;**
- (2) Initiate discussions with officials at the Department for Transport, to ensure that any direction of travel is in-line with government policy; and**
- (3) For the Chief Officer to work with Audit and Governance Committee to develop options for the future direction of travel and present these to Partnership Board in October**

1. Overview

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Partnership Board’s agreement on the next steps Transport for the South East should take, following the General Election.

2. Transport for the South East’s development up to this point

2.1 Transport for the South East (TfSE) was established in July 2017 through Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) across the South East who wanted to come together to plan and prioritise long-term infrastructure across the region. Speaking with a single voice TfSE aims to grow the South East economy by delivering a safe, sustainable and integrated transport system that makes the South East more productive and competitive, improves quality of life for all residents and enhances its natural and built environment.

2.2 Since 2017, we have been operating strategically across the South East directly influencing where money is invested and facilitating significant collaboration across LTAs in the South East. This has culminated in the recent launch of our Centre of Excellence, which provides advice, support, tools and resources to our local transport authorities.

2.3 The ability to create Sub-national Transport Bodies to plan and prioritise long-term infrastructure investment in a specific region was established by Parliament through an amendment to the Local Transport Act 2008 which was passed in January 2016. Transport for the North became the first statutory Sub-national Transport Body (STB) in 2018, bringing together nineteen of the local and combined authority partners before being approved by Parliament.

2.4 TfSE has aspired to become a statutory body since its formation, recognising the benefits of this, by giving us a role that’s clearly defined role in legislation, and the level of permanence and

stakeholder buy-in that this provides. The TfSE board also wished to formalise our relationship with the likes of Network Rail and Highways England so we can inform their investment programmes based on the priorities of communities, passengers, businesses and decision-makers across the region.

2.5 In 2020, the Board agreed to submit a proposal for statutory status to Government, alongside our Transport Strategy, which set our bold ambitions for the region. Then Transport Secretary Grant Shapps did not sign off our proposal for statutory status, so we were not able to progress it at that time. Ministers hinted that TfSE should wait until the next parliament to bring their statutory status forward and that TfSE should continue as a voluntary, non-statutory partnership until then.

3. Next Steps for Transport for the South East

3.1 Whilst TfSE have had a number of successes as a non-statutory partnership, a new Government means that the time is right to assess our options for the future direction of travel. A new Government will mean a number of changes to policy on transport, devolution and infrastructure. As an organisation, TfSE cannot afford to sit still, and assume that the approach that worked during the previous Government will continue to be effective.

3.2 We need to ensure that TfSE delivers the maximum value for LTAs and other partners and is set up in the best way possible to help achieve Government aims and objectives. It is therefore right that Partnership Board is able to consider options for the future direction of travel of TfSE at the October Board.

3.3 To enable this to happen effectively, TfSE will seek views from the LTAs and partners, engage with Government officials and work with Audit and Governance Committee to develop options for the Board. These options will enable the Board to come to a view on opening up the conversation with the new Government on the powers we need to turn our ambition for the South East into reality.

4. Next Steps for Transport for the South East

4.1 The Partnership Board is recommended to agree that Transport for the South East should take the next steps set out in this paper.

RUPERT CLUBB

Chief Officer

Transport for the South East

Contact Officer: Keir Wilkins

Email: keir.wilkins@eastsussex.gov.uk