

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

**Date of meeting:** 28 October 2024

**By:** Chief Officer

**Title of report:** Next Steps for Transport for the South East

**Purpose of report:** To review the responses Transport for the South East has received on its next steps consultation.

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***RECOMMENDATION:***

**The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to note the responses Transport for the South East has received on its next steps consultation and note the opportunity to consider next steps at the March partnership board meeting.**

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**1. Overview**

1.1 Following a request from Partnership Board, Transport for the South East (TfSE) consulted with local authorities and other key stakeholders on the next steps we should take as an organisation, following the General Election.

**2. Background**

2.1 Members asked TfSE to develop options for next steps for TfSE following the General Election. The change of government, programme of legislative reform (including, for example the creation of Great British Railways) and potential new devolution arrangements provides a timely opportunity to consider how TfSE as sub-national transport body (STB) can most effectively deliver the transport strategy on behalf of the Board.

2.2 Up to this point, TfSE has been operating as a voluntary partnership with an agreed constitution and inter authority agreement to underpin its activities. In establishing ourselves as a voluntary partnership, TfSE have replicated the principles set out in Cities and Local Devolution Act 2016, which amends the Transport Act 2008, providing the framework for STBs to be established. We deliver the same core functions of an STB that are set out in legislation, and we have the same constitutional arrangements of a statutory STB, with democratic accountability delivered through our Partnership Board.

2.3 Broadly, there are two options that TfSE could take as next steps as an organisation. We could continue to act as a voluntary partnership or ask the Department for Transport (DfT) to provide powers and functions set out in the Cities and Local

Devolution act, in certain agreed policy areas, to enable us to deliver more on behalf of our local authorities.

2.4 In October, the Board asked TfSE to consult with local authorities and other key stakeholders on whether TfSE devolved powers would help them to achieve their objectives.

### **3. Consultation Responses**

3.1 In total 13 responses were received, 7 through the online survey platform and 6 via email. Responses were received from the following organisations:

- Isle of Wight Council
- Surrey County Council
- Kent County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Southampton City Council, Portsmouth City Council, Hampshire County Council and Isle of Wight Council (combined response)
- Network Rail
- National Highways
- New Forest District Council
- Wealden District Council
- Shoreham Port
- Wightlink
- Community Transport Association
- England's Economic Heartland

3.2 At the same time as the consultation, TfSE's Chair had a number of meetings with local authority leaders in our region. The feedback from these meetings and consultation responses was that local authorities are supportive of the work that TfSE does to support delivery. Many local authority leaders cited examples of TfSE moving forward investment in transport in their area and helping them to work on significant issues that their area faces.

3.3 Local authority leaders that responded were open to supporting TfSE having the general powers as a sub-national transport body, alongside powers on roads, railways, and funding and finance, but said that they needed to see the English Devolution White Paper before agreeing to this. There was consistent feedback that TfSE should not duplicate any powers that local authorities may seek as combined authorities, and that TfSE should always work at a regional level, focusing on issues which cross local authority boundaries.

3.4 Many authorities noted that it was difficult to respond given their emerging plans to explore devolution deals and the transition to GB Rail. This applies to Surrey, Solent (combined response), Kent and West Sussex. Of those respondents who completed the survey views were relatively supportive or again reflecting there was uncertainty at this time:

- 4 respondents were supportive or very supportive of TfSE having general powers, whilst 3 respondents were neither supportive nor unsupportive. (7 responses in total).
- 4 respondents were supportive or very supportive of TfSE having railway powers, whilst 4 respondents were neither supportive nor unsupportive. (8 responses in total).
- 4 respondents were supportive or very supportive of TfSE having highway powers, whilst 3 were neither supportive nor not supportive, and 1 was not supportive.
- 6 respondents were supportive or very supportive of TfSE having funding and finance powers, whilst 2 neither supportive nor unsupportive about this. (8 responses in total).

3.5 The English Devolution White Paper was published on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024. The White Paper set out a framework for development of combined authorities in the South East. At the time of writing Local Authorities are waiting for the outcome of their proposals to join devolution priority programme to be announced by government. For the time being TfSE will pause work on next steps until we gain greater clarity over the devolution proposals in the South East. Meanwhile TfSE will support local authorities in their devolution discussions in relation to Transport, as identified in the business planning paper. At the March board meeting we expect there will be further clarity on the geographies for the South East which will provide an opportunity for the board to consider next steps.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

4.1 The Partnership Board is recommended to review the responses Transport for the South East has received on its next steps consultation.

**RUPERT CLUBB**  
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