

Agenda item 11

Report to: Partnership Board –Transport for the South East

Date of meeting: 21 July 2025

By: Chief Officer, Transport for the South East

Title of report: Communications and Engagement Plan 2025/26

Purpose of report: To provide the board with the Communications and Engagement Plan for 2025/26

RECOMMENDATION:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to consider and approve the Communications and Engagement plan 2025/26.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Communication and Engagement Plan 2025/26 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 2025/26.

2. Background

2.1 The communications and engagement plan for 2025/26 supports TfSE's strategic priorities and reflects the evolving political and policy landscape. The plan sets out clear objectives to raise awareness, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and position TfSE as a trusted regional voice—particularly in the context of devolution and local government reorganisation.

2.2 Activity will include a mix of proactive media and digital engagement, targeted political communications, and collaborative campaigns with partners, ensuring we remain visible, relevant and influential throughout the year.

3. Contents

3.1 The plan contains the following:

- The role of TfSE
- The role of Communications and Engagement at TfSE
- Understanding our audiences
- Our engagement
- Working with our region's MPs
- Current/Future challenges

- Key interactions with MPs 2023/24
- Devolution and local government reorganisation
- Comms and engagement implications
- Comms and engagement strategy
- Devolution/LGR strategy
- Measuring success

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 The Partnership Board is recommended to consider and approve the plan. The board will continue to receive updates on all communications and engagement activity throughout the year.

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Chief Officer

Transport for the South East

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Communications and Engagement Plan 2025/26



The Role of Transport for the South East



To **determine** the transport infrastructure needed to deliver economic growth to the South East.



To **connect** local transport authorities, partners, community organisations, politicians & businesses across the TfSE region.



To **speak** with one voice to government about our regional transport needs.



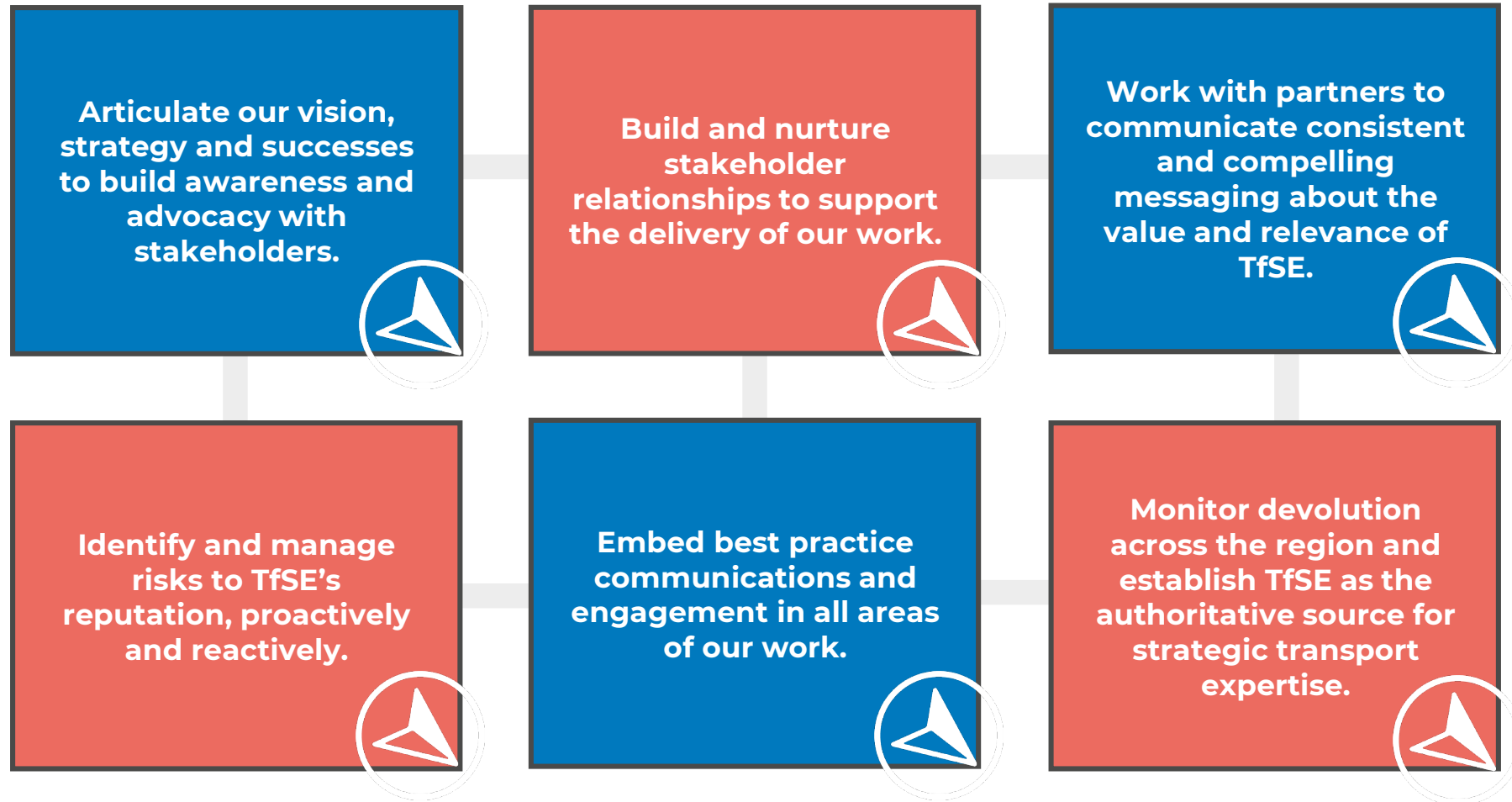
To **provide** evidence-based solutions to improve transport connectivity in the region.



To **consult** with local communities and stakeholders about our future connectivity plans.



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



Understanding our Audiences

National Government: Maintaining strong engagement with Ministers and parliamentary stakeholders is essential. We'll continue meeting Ministers, MPs and closely track parliamentary activity to stay informed on the transport issues that matter most to our region's representatives.

Local Government: As devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) unfold in 2025/26 and beyond, we'll adapt our approach to strengthen and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with constituent authorities—including their communications teams.

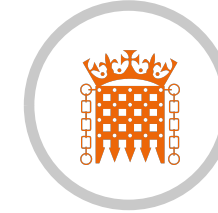
Industry: We've built strong alliances with transport industry partners and broadened regional business and commercial connections through initiatives like our Business Advisory Group. We'll keep nurturing and expanding these networks.

Public/Users: Overall awareness among residents remains low, but feedback from the transport strategy consultation was encouraging, offering a valuable opportunity to deepen public involvement.

Media: Awareness of TfSE in local, regional and national media has room to grow, but with the right, accessible content and story telling, although good recognition in the trade press shows we're on the right track.



Local
Government



Political



Residents



Business



Industry



Media

Our Engagement

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

We manage numerous stakeholder groups ranging from our Partnership Board to technical steering groups and Transport Forum.

Contact with our wider stakeholders is conducted through our monthly 'Connections' newsletter, with almost 4000 subscribers.

We have attended a series of external events including Interchange in Manchester and DfT workshops while supporting colleagues hosting training sessions for transport officers.

Social media engagement has increased over the past year, with the number of followers on our channels up nearly 8%.

Engaging the Region: Supporting the Transport Strategy Refresh

Communications and engagement around the Transport Strategy Refresh were a key focus, combining digital, media and in-person activity to drive awareness and participation.

We ran a region-wide campaign that included regular social media posts, targeted web content, eight public roadshows, and direct emails to local transport authorities, districts and boroughs, MPs, and previous survey respondents.

A media pack supported wider coverage, while a launch video gained almost 400 views and social content was shared 140 times across LinkedIn, Facebook and X.

The campaign delivered a total of 865 responses—753 from individuals (up 47% from 2020) and 108 from organisations, alongside four MPs. Compared to the 2020 consultation, total responses rose by 69%, driven primarily by increased individual engagement.

While organisational responses decreased, the sharp rise in public participation reflects the growing relevance of our work to residents across the South East.



LinkedIn followers up 19%, our most popular channel with 1322 followers



Facebook followers reached 233, up 35%



X followers down 12%, although the channel saw a global decline in users



Working with Our Region's MPs



Following the 2024 General Election, we continued our efforts to engage with the region's MPs, and have held meetings with the following either virtually or face to face:

Kieran Mullan	MP for Bexhill and Battle
Jess Brown-Fuller	MP for Chichester
Monica Harding	MP for Esher and Walton
John Milne	MP for Horsham
Joshua Reynolds	MP for Maidenhead
Lee Dillon	MP for Newbury
Matt Rodda	MP for Reading Central
Al Pinkerton	MP for Surrey Heath
Nus Ghani	MP for Sussex Weald
Will Forster	MP for Woking
Clive Jones	MP for Wokingham
Zöe Franklin	MP for Guildford
Alison Bennett	MP for Mid Sussex
James MacCleary	MP for Lewes
Peter Swallow	MP for Bracknell
Amanda Martin	MP for Portsmouth North
Stephen Morgan	MP for Portsmouth South
Joe Robertson	MP for Isle of Wight East
Kevin McKenna	MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey
Lauren Edwards	MP for Rochester and Strood
Tom Rutland	MP for East Worthing and Shoreham



All MPs and their offices receive a copy of our monthly newsletter

Social media support from MPs

We provided a Transport Strategy consultation media pack to all MPs in January, some of whom shared the information with constituents on their own social channels, significantly increasing our social media reach.

TfSE at Conference

We attended the 2024 Liberal Democrat annual conference in Brighton, offering a valuable opportunity to connect with the South East's Liberal Democrat MPs. The event enabled us to share key information about TfSE's role and priorities, with several MPs expressing interest in follow-up meetings with our Chair and Chief Officer



Current/Future Challenges



Finances: Sustained Pressure on Local Authorities

Local authorities across the South East continue to face severe financial pressures, with rising demand and limited budgets. There is also a growing national conversation around rebalancing investment between northern and southern councils, which risks disadvantaging our region.

Resources: Capacity Gaps and Sector Pressures

Local authorities are being asked to do more with less, including headcount reductions and limited specialist capacity. Meanwhile, the broader transport sector faces its own challenges: skills shortages, post-COVID recovery, and inflation-driven cost pressures.

Relevance: Staying Front of Mind in a Crowded Landscape

With attention focused on devolution, funding crises and service delivery, it's even more important for TfSE to demonstrate value and worth to our audiences.

Net Zero & New Thinking: Evolving Public Perception

Commitment to Net Zero remains a government priority, but political and public debate is shifting on the topic.

Geography: Clarifying the South East Story

Many still mistakenly assume London is part of TfSE's geography—leading to misperceptions around fairness in funding and the associated need to ensure that efforts to champion the South East are maintained by TfSE.

Noise: Breaking Through a Busy Agenda

With audiences increasingly saturated with competing priorities, it's even more difficult to land messages but more important to be targeted and selected in our comms approach.



Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation

A Changing Governance Landscape

Devolution and local government reorganisation is reshaping local governance across the South East. New combined authorities will emerge, with evolving responsibilities, priorities and leadership structures.

New Audiences, New Expectations

The shift brings fresh stakeholders into the fold—new mayors, cabinets, policy leads and delivery teams. We need to build visibility and trust early, offering clear, value-driven messaging that positions TfSE as a key strategic partner.

Uncertainty in the Short Term

The pace and nature of change will vary across the region, leading to a fluid and sometimes unclear picture. Rather than wait to see how things develop, we need to communicate through the ambiguity, offering reassurance and clarity while the new landscape takes shape.

An Evolving Role for STBs

As the governance environment settles, we will need to redefine and demonstrate our value with the new devolved authorities, championing TfSE's unique role as a connector, strategic planner and source of expert analysis on strategic transport across the region.



Comms & Engagement Implications



Need to understand devolution and implications for TfSE

A clear internal understanding of the shifting landscape is essential to shape informed, confident messaging and engagement.

Need to flex and respond to different—and changing—needs of LAs

Comms must remain adaptable, recognising varied capacities, priorities and structures across local authorities.

Need to develop TfSE narrative for new audiences

A refreshed, accessible narrative is needed to introduce TfSE to new stakeholders, including mayors, combined authorities and evolving leadership teams.

Need to show outputs, add value, maintain relevance

Demonstrating tangible impact through clear, compelling content helps reinforce TfSE's value amid competing priorities.

Need to continue BAU and provide ongoing support to LAs

Consistent communication and support maintain trust and stability while the wider environment evolves.

Need to prepare for the future

Proactive messaging must anticipate change, showing how TfSE is future-ready and aligned with long-term regional and national goals.

Need for early engagement with emerging structures

Early, relationship-building comms are vital to secure influence, shape shared priorities and ensure TfSE is embedded from the outset.

Need to reaffirm TfSE's role as a convenor and strategic influencer

Communications should reinforce TfSE's unique ability to bring partners together, bridging boundaries and creating regional coherence in uncertain times.

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 for who we are, what we do and the value we bring to the South East.
- To collaborate with partners and stakeholders to deliver a consistent, compelling narrative that supports our objectives.
- To forge mutually beneficial relationships, creating advocates and deepening our engagement with politicians and partners.
- To promote and support the work of TfSE including the refresh of our Transport Strategy and Strategic Investment Plan.
- To position TfSE as a credible, expert partner with new and emerging audiences including regional mayors and combined authorities.
- To empower TfSE staff to contribute to quality communications and engagement activity that supports our business objectives.

Strategy

- Tell the South East story with confidence, challenging misconceptions and demonstrating TfSE's value.
- Use co-ordinated comms and engagement to showcase the strength and unity of our partnerships where possible
- Create clear and compelling messages, founded in the real transport needs of people and businesses across the region. Communicate with empathy and authenticity, listening and responding and telling human-centred stories.
- Strengthen our insight base and stay closely aligned to political priorities to drive targeted, effective engagement.
- Stay visible and relevant by proactively positioning TfSE in key regional and national conversations.
- Build & sustain strategic alliances, recognising the role of trusted relationships in securing advocacy, influence & long-term support.

Audiences

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

Tactics

- Develop a clear TfSE narrative explaining what we are, what we do and the value we add, tailored for both new and existing audiences
- Enhance political monitoring and intelligence, with a stronger focus on MPs, mayors and key decision makers to better understand their strategic transport priorities
- Improve digital communications, including the frequency of updates across the website and social media, highlighting both TfSE initiatives and the successes of our LA partners.
- Share updates on key projects using clear accessible formats, through channels such as *Connections* and other appropriate platforms.
- Increase media engagement to showcase where TfSE is delivering a tangible impact.
- Deliver joint communications with partners wherever possible, demonstrating a unified voice for the region.
- Explore opportunities in which the Centre of Excellence can be used to host communications resources to promote best practice.

Devolution/LGR Comms Strategy



Business objective

Position TfSE as a strategic partner for emerging regional mayors and combined authorities

Communication & engagement objectives

- Maintain and strengthen TfSE's relevance during governance and policy shifts.
- Build awareness and understanding of TfSE's role among new stakeholders while maintaining an ongoing focus on existing LA partners.
- Support consistent, informed engagement across all levels of the organisation.
- Track and respond to evolving stakeholder needs through evidence and feedback
- Ensure mayors view TfSE as an enabler of regional success

Strategy

- Position TfSE clearly and confidently as an expert advisor and trusted regional collaborator in the evolving governance landscape.
- Identify and understand these emerging audiences by mapping key stakeholders and monitoring shifts in governance structures and policy priorities.
- Build and maintain strong relationships through early, proactive engagement with new authorities while sustaining trusted connections with existing partners.
- Tailor communications and messaging to reflect new audience priorities, shared goals and regional distinctiveness, ensuring clarity and impact.
- Maintain visibility and demonstrate leadership by actively participating in relevant policy conversations, events and media.

Audiences

- Mayoral candidates, newly appointed mayors, new local gov transport leaders / new partnership board members.

Tactics

- Draft a TfSE prospectus with TfSE narrative and timeline
- Produce introductory briefings, slide decks and Q&As for new stakeholders.
- Create stakeholder mapping identifying strategic priorities and preferences.
- Establish a dialogue including welcome meetings and onboarding briefings with new authorities.
- Generate audience-specific content (e.g. infographics, explainer videos, project spotlights).
- Use the website, LinkedIn and sector media to amplify TfSE messages and promote those from the new authorities.
- Track engagement and stakeholder feedback.
- Monitor media, parliamentary activity and political shifts to inform ongoing comms

Measuring Success



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- ❑ Ensure that TfSE is seen as a trusted voice on strategic transport development in the region.
- ❑ Position TfSE as key partner and industry expert with emerging mayors and combined authorities.
- ❑ Increase our social media reach and engagement.
- ❑ Deliver two in-person Transport Forum events and two digital Transport Forum events.
- ❑ Further enhance our existing relationships and engagement with local transport authorities.
- ❑ Improve public affairs activities including monitoring of MPs and mayoral candidates.

	2024/25 Targets	2024/25 Outcomes	2025/2026 Targets
LinkedIn	1500 followers	1322 31/3/25	1500
X	1500 followers	956 31/3/25	950 (manage decline despite good engagement)
Facebook	N/A	233 31/3/25	250
Podcast	100 average listens per episode	Reached 70 but inconsistent production in 2025	No longer monthly, future uncertain
Connections newsletter subscribers	N/A	3900	4300
MP Meetings	At least two per month	Met 21, but regular scheduling is difficult	Two per month
LTA Face to Face Meetings	At least one per month	Virtual meetings with 13 LTAs in Spring 2025	Meet reps of constituent LTAs at least once

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 and Mayors:

- ✓ 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.