

Report to: Partnership Board –Transport for the South East

Date of meeting: 27 October 2025

By: Co-Chairs, Business Advisory Group

Title of report: Business Advisory Group

Purpose of report: To update the Partnership Board on the progress of TfSE's Business Advisory Group

RECOMMENDATION:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to note the progress of the Business Advisory Group.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Business Advisory Group (BAG) was formed in October 2024. It is co-chaired by Vince Lucas and Daniel Ruiz. The group provides a business voice to support, advise and contribute to the Partnership Board.

2. Business Advisory Group – Feedback for Partnership Board

2.1 The BAG met on Wednesday 1 October virtually.

2.2 The BAG received an update on key work that will go to TfSE's Partnership Board for approval, including the Transport Strategy and Regional Travel Survey. A number of Group Members had contributed to the Transport Strategy consultation and were supportive of the fact that it will still be submitted to the Department for Transport as the region's formal advice. There was a strong appetite for the data provided by the Regional Travel Survey, which could help to inform businesses' strategic planning.

2.3 The BAG also discussed DfT's decision to cease funding for TfSE, alongside other sub-national transport bodies, following a transition year in 2026/27. The Group asked the Co-Chair to make the case for future funding. It was felt that without TfSE there could be a vacuum, with businesses not brought together at a regional level to work on strategic transport issues.

Business Advisory Group – Progress

3.1 The BAG had a wide-ranging discussion on the challenges and opportunities facing business, and progress that has been made since the last meeting:

- An event hosted by Kent County Council to make the case for re-opening cross-channel rail from Ashford and Ebbsfleet, attended by the BAG Co-Chair.

- The news that the Transport Secretary had approved the Gatwick Airport expansion, with targets for travel to the airport through public transport. TfSE are supporting a Kent-Gatwick Rail Enhancements SOBC that could help meet this.
- Work that the Hampshire Prosperity Board are undertaking on rural isolation, which TfSE will provide evidence for.
- Updates on the Government's plans to bring rail services into public ownership.

3.2 The discussion followed three main themes. The group felt there is a need to make transport investable, affordable, and reliable.

- **The need to make transport schemes investible** – Business Members agreed that the South East needs transport investment now and cannot wait for Government funding. They supported the work being led by TfSE's Funding and Finance Group to develop a mode for funding and finance that could unlock investment. This could lead to the development of investible propositions that could be used to attract private financing of schemes. The BAG will also contribute business views to the SIP Refresh.
- **Affordability is an issue** – All businesses, but particularly smaller businesses, are facing significant cost pressures. The BAG said that the more that could be done to keep the cost of transporting people and goods affordable, the better.
- **Reliability and resilience are key** – Businesses need transport networks which their staff and customers can rely on every day. The BAG supported TfSE Transport Strategy Mission on resilience and asked for TfSE to continue to take a lead in this area, noting work on the SIP Refresh to assess how schemes impact resilience.

3.3 The BAG also reflected on the success of the Business Summit, with over 75% of attendees who responded to the survey calling their overall experience excellent or good. The Group provided initial feedback on the Business Summit report, ahead of further work. This report will be submitted to the Department for Transport, as the advice of TfSE's Business Advisory Group.

3.4 Members of the BAG asked TfSE to organise another Business Summit next Summer. The next Summit could focus on the emerging themes discussed at this meeting, including how to make transport schemes investable, and how to make transport affordable and reliable for the user.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 The Partnership Board is recommended to note the progress of the Business Advisory Group.

Daniel Ruiz and Vince Lucas
Co-Chairs – Business Advisory Group
Transport for the South East

Contact Officer: Keir Wilkins

Email: Keir.Wilkins@transportforthesoutheast.org.uk