

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

Date of meeting: **26 September 2022**

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

Title of report: **Centre of Excellence**

Purpose of report: **To update the Board on the development of a proposed Centre of Excellence**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to:

- (1) Note the proposed approach to the Centre of Excellence;**
 - (2) Agree the draft business case for submission to the Department for Transport to seek agreement to release the funding; and**
 - (3) Agree to delegate responsibility for the procurement of the platform and content to the Lead Officer.**
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1. Introduction

1.1 TfSE set out proposals in its Business Plan for 2022/23 to start the development of a Centre of Excellence. The aim of this would be to support local transport authorities (LTAs) in addressing capacity and capability challenges, with particular focus on the delivery and implementation of local transport plans.

1.2 The Levelling Up White Paper, published in February 2022, set out proposals for regional centres of excellence. The Department for Transport (DfT) have since indicated that sub-national transport bodies (STBs) will be tasked with establishing and operating centres of excellence in their regions.

1.3 The DfT have requested further information from TfSE on how a proposed centre of excellence would operate in the south east and to demonstrate that it has the support from constituent authorities.

1.4 The purpose of this paper is to set out the high-level proposals for a centre of excellence, including how local authorities will be involved in the co-design and next steps.

2 Background to Centre of Excellence

2.1 In February 2022, the government published the Levelling Up White Paper, which included a commitment to explore regional centres of excellence that would provide bespoke support to LTAs. The DfT have subsequently set out expectations that STBs would take responsibility for developing and operating centres of excellence in their region. This activity would need to be funded through existing DfT grants to STBs.

2.2 The report into the future of TfSE, agreed by the Board in October 2021, identified a role for TfSE in supporting improved capacity and capability to meet the future needs of the region's stakeholders. Alongside the local capability and capacity work stream, awarded by DfT in January 2022, TfSE had already started to develop ideas around a centre of excellence concept and reflected this in the Business Plan, agreed by the Board in May 2022.

2.3 The Business Plan identified that £250,000 of the DfT annual grant would be allocated to activities supporting the development of a Centre of Excellence in 2022/23. It is also intended to recruit a dedicated project manager role to support the centre of excellence later this autumn, with a view to the role commencing early 2023. This would also be funded through the DfT annual grant.

2.4 The DfT have considered the TfSE Business Plan and have indicated £250,000 intended for the centre of excellence development, would be released subject to agreeing further details on how it would be used.

3. Engagement with Local Authorities

3.1 Through the ongoing work on local capability, discussions have been held with LTA officers to get their views and insight into how a centre of excellence would be utilised and to gauge support for the proposal.

3.2 To date, the concept has received broad support with LTA officers recognising that it could offer bespoke tools, guidance and advice on the delivery and implementation of local transport plans. However, it is clear that further work will be needed to define the scope for the centre of excellence and to ensure that a robust development plan is put in place to ensure that it evolves over time and continues to meet the changing needs of LTAs.

3.3 The types of support that the centre of excellence could offer include: convening best practice and resource coordinators; providing tools and expertise; facilitating procurement of specialist services; and the opportunity for peer review. This could cover a wide range of topics that would support the delivery of LTPs, such as business case development and producing good bids, development of pipeline schemes, Quantifiable Carbon Reduction support and ongoing delivery of some of the short-term work on electric vehicle infrastructure and local capability.

3.4 There is a desire for the centre of excellence to be co-designed. This process would need to involve LTAs and the DfT to ensure that the content of the centre of excellence enhanced and supported the existing tools and guidance available at national and local level.

4. Proposed approach to Centre of Excellence development

4.1 The first phase of the centre of excellence development will be broken down into two stages:

- a. Understanding the needs of LTAs – as highlighted above, the centre of excellence will need to be co-designed with LTAs and DfT. This stage would assess the existing tools and guidance available to LTAs, the gaps that need to be filled, setting out a development plan for the tool (i.e. what would be achieved in first 12 months and how it would adapt over time), how it would be used, etc.

- b. Designing a platform – the centre of excellence will not initially have a physical presence. It is likely to be an online tool, but the precise nature of this will need to be defined following the assessment of the LTA needs. An appropriate provider would be tasked with scoping a solution and build an appropriate platform. This should be scalable to reflect changing needs over time and for potential roll out to other STB areas and it will need to be easy to access, use and maintain.

4.2 The main content development will take place from 2023 onwards, with the scope of the centre of excellence expanding as TfSE's own capacity and capability expands. However, it is clear that there are already a number of existing tools and guidance that can be built into the development of the centre of excellence, including ProjectView, future mobility tools and freight work.

4.3 TfSE has agreed, through discussions with DfT, to take responsibility for the convening of a joint STB group to consider the collective approach to the regional centres of excellence. This will offer an opportunity for STBs to share best practice, identify areas for further collaboration and possible opportunities to streamline procurement processes and encourage efficiencies. The first meeting of the group will take place late September 2022.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Following agreement of the Partnership Board, a short proposal will be submitted to DfT seeking the release of the £250,000 grant funding to support the initial development of the centre of excellence (appendix 1).

5.2 Once DfT have approved the funding, TfSE will then start the procurement process to bring in appropriate suppliers to deliver phase one of the centre of excellence. The procurement processes of the accountable body would be followed for this activity and the Board are asked to agree to delegate authority for this exercise to the Lead Officer.

5.3 TfSE would initially look to populate the centre of excellence with existing tools, such as ProjectView, but would also aim to start commissioning bespoke content, focused on the areas identified by LTAs, early in 2023/24.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Partnership Board is recommended to note the proposed approach to the development of the Centre of Excellence and agree that a proposal should be submitted to DfT to draw down the additional funding for this. The Board are also asked to agree to delegate authority for the procurement of stage one of the centre of excellence development, subject to receipt of the funding from DfT.

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Appendix 1: Proposal to DfT to draw down funding

TfSE set out proposals in its Business Plan for 2022/23 to start the development of a Centre of Excellence. The aim of this would be to support local transport authorities (LTAs) in addressing capacity and capability challenges, with particular focus on the delivery and implementation of local transport plans.

The Levelling Up White Paper, published in February 2022, set out proposals for regional centres of excellence. The Department for Transport (DfT) have since indicated that sub-national transport bodies (STBs) will be tasked with establishing and operating centres of excellence in their regions.

DfT have requested further information from TfSE on how a proposed centre of excellence would operate in the region and to demonstrate that it has the support from constituent authorities. This is required to release the £250,000 grant funding that TfSE would like to utilise to support the initial stages of the development of the Centre of Excellence.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the tangible activities that TfSE intends to deliver in 2022/23.

A Regional Centre of Excellence

To date, the concept has received broad support with LTA officers recognising that it could offer bespoke tools, guidance and advice on the delivery and implementation of local transport plans. However, it is clear that further work will be needed to define the scope for the centre of excellence and to ensure that a robust development plan is put in place to ensure that it evolves over time and continues to meet the changing needs of LTAs.

The types of support that the centre of excellence could offer include: convening best practice and resource coordinators; providing tools and expertise; facilitating procurement of specialist services; and the opportunity for peer review. This could cover a wide range of topics that would support the delivery of LTPs, such as business case development and producing good bids, development of pipeline schemes, Quantifiable Carbon Reduction support and ongoing delivery of some of the short-term work on electric vehicle infrastructure and local capability.

There is a desire for the centre of excellence to be co-designed. This process would need to involve LTAs and the DfT to ensure that the content of the centre of excellence enhanced and supported the existing tools and guidance available at national and local level.

Intended activities for 2022/23

- Secure high level support from constituent authorities at the September 2022 Partnership Board meeting;
- Procure consultants to deliver phase 1 of the centre of excellence development:
 - a. Understanding LTA needs –
 - delivery of LTA workshops (involving DfT) to understand specific needs and expectations from the centre of excellence;

- understand existing guidance and advice, identify gaps and where bespoke solutions are required in the region;
 - review best practice from other centres of excellence at a national and international level;
 - create a development plan for short, medium and long term to set out how the CoE will develop to meet changing needs.
- b. Scoping and developing the platform
- Using information and evidence from the LTA workshops, scope an appropriate solution.
 - This should be scalable to reflect changing needs over time and for potential roll out to other STB areas;
 - It will need to be easy to access, use and maintain.
- Complete Phase 1a by end of January 2023;
 - Commence procurement of Phase 1b in February 2023, with a view to completing the work by early summer 2023
 - Recruit a project manager to support the centre of excellence by January 2023¹

In addition to the areas above, which will be funded through the DfT grant funding, TfSE will take responsibility for the convening and management of a joint STB centre of excellence group for the first year of operation, after which time the role would be rotated around other STBs. This will offer an opportunity for the seven STBs to share best practice on the development of their individual CoEs, but also identify areas for further collaboration, joint procurement, etc.

¹ The Centre of Excellence Project Manager will be funded through the TfSE staffing budget, rather than the £250,000 for the Centre of Excellence development.