

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

Date of meeting: **3 July 2023**

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

Title of report: **A rail partnership for the wider south east**

Purpose of report: **To agree the proposal for a rail partnership in the wider south east**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The members of the Partnership Board are recommended to:

- (1) Agree the high level scope for a rail partnership in the wider south east;**
- (2) Agree the proposed governance arrangements for the partnership; and**
- (3) Agree the Lead Officer progresses discussions on the partnership.**

1. Overview

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present a proposal for the creation of a rail partnership for the wider south east. This builds on the proposals presented by the Secretary of State in February 2023 for Great British Railways.

1.2 This proposal would bring together the wider south eastern sub-national transport bodies (STBs) (Transport East (TE), Transport for the South East (TfSE), England's Economic Heartland (EEH) as well as London (through Transport for London- TfL)) to better work with the rail industry, particularly Great British Railways (GBR) and Department for Transport. This would form a new 'Wider South East Rail' partnership. The report provides more detail on the proposed governance, structure and remit for the partnership.

2. Context and strategic direction

2.1 In February 2023, the Secretary of State set out the government's latest plans for GBR. This includes the proposal set out in the Williams-Shapps White Paper for national rail reform to establish a Wider South East Rail partnership. England's three STBs in the wider south east are uniquely positioned to work with the new body to maximise the potential of our rail network, ensuring its full integration with the wider transport network aligned to the regional Transport Strategies and Local Transport Plans.

2.2 The regional transport strategies have been developed to facilitate economic growth and have regard to social and environmental impacts. They are based on both local evidence and national policy, taking account of local plans and land use allocations, economic activity, local transport integration and environmental conditions

within each region. They identify the role of strategic transport in supporting the wider south east and UK economy, making the case for transport investment to increase productivity and highlights the impacts of not investing.

2.3 The economic potential of the wider south east is spread across high performing cities, towns, innovation centres, international gateways, science parks, coastal and rural communities. Our connection with the global city of London is important and historically has been the defining orientation of its rail network. However, the wider south east economy requires both radial and orbital rail connectivity for it to flourish for the benefit of the UK economy. There are also parts of this wider region that need support and investment if they are to level up.

2.4 The three STB transport strategies prioritise integrating rail into a wider connected transport network with improved east west connectivity, enhancing capacity and reducing congestion on both the radial routes and London transport network. This will support mode shift to rail for both passengers and freight, as well as helping enable economic growth and decarbonisation.

3. A wider south east rail partnership

3.1 Creating a Wider South East Rail Partnership will ensure the agreed transport strategies for regional connectivity are embedded in GBR's approach. The partnership can work alongside GBR to take a strategic planning approach to facilitating economic growth, enabling social benefits, and increasing connectivity.

3.2 The Secretary of State has confirmed they will have regard to STB Transport Strategies and Strategic Investment Plans in the development of policy and investment decisions. The oversight role of the wider south east partnership will ensure due regard is given to the rail interventions set out in each of the regional strategies and strategic investment plans which would improve connectivity across the three regions and better access to rail for all.

3.3 The partnership would be endorsed by the respective STB Boards to oversee strategic elements of rail planning across the wider south east and, where required, provide collective advice to the Secretary of State on rail delivery priorities for the wider south east. The three regional transport strategies and strategic investment plans and Mayor's Transport Strategy – all subject to rigorous public consultation and endorsement through locally democratic processes - alongside GBR's 30-year plan for rail, will provide an established framework on which the Partnership can collaborate and identify the investment priorities in the wider south east.

3.4 The proposed partnership will bring together the three STBs with GBR and TfL, with the STBs representing local authorities and business. It will provide strategic oversight of timetabling and infrastructure investments and have a focus on ensuring consistent customer experience in areas for passengers such as access, ticketing and communications, and freight including capacity and traction.

3.5 It is anticipated that the partnership will work alongside current and emerging devolution deals across the wider south east.

3.6 The proposed governance arrangements for the partnership are set out in Appendix 1 and the proposed remit of the partnership is presented in Appendix 2.

4 Benefits of the proposed partnership

4.1 The proposed partnership would have a range of benefits for government, the STBs and regional stakeholders. These include:

Benefits to government:

- Clarity of rail vision and priorities of the wider south east within an integrated transport framework
- Streamlined strategic engagement on rail planning, investment and customer experience (passenger and freight) within the wider south east through a democratically accountable structure
- Provision of timely, strategic advice on rail investment, performance and customer experience.

Benefits to stakeholders:

- Mechanism to embed rail priorities as set out in regional integrated strategies into wider GBR and DfT planning, investment decisions and performance management
- Coordinated escalation point for local strategic rail issues
- Coordinated voice to Secretary of State for Transport on regional rail priorities to ensure 'due regard' is taken by government.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 The collective proposal by the STBs provides an opportunity to shape the partnership and ensure that it reflects STB priorities. The Partnership Board are recommended to agree the high level scope and proposed governance arrangements for the partnership.

5.2 It is proposed that the Lead Officer progresses discussions with the other STBs, TfL and GBR, with regular progress reports to the Partnership Board.

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Lead Officer

Transport for the South East

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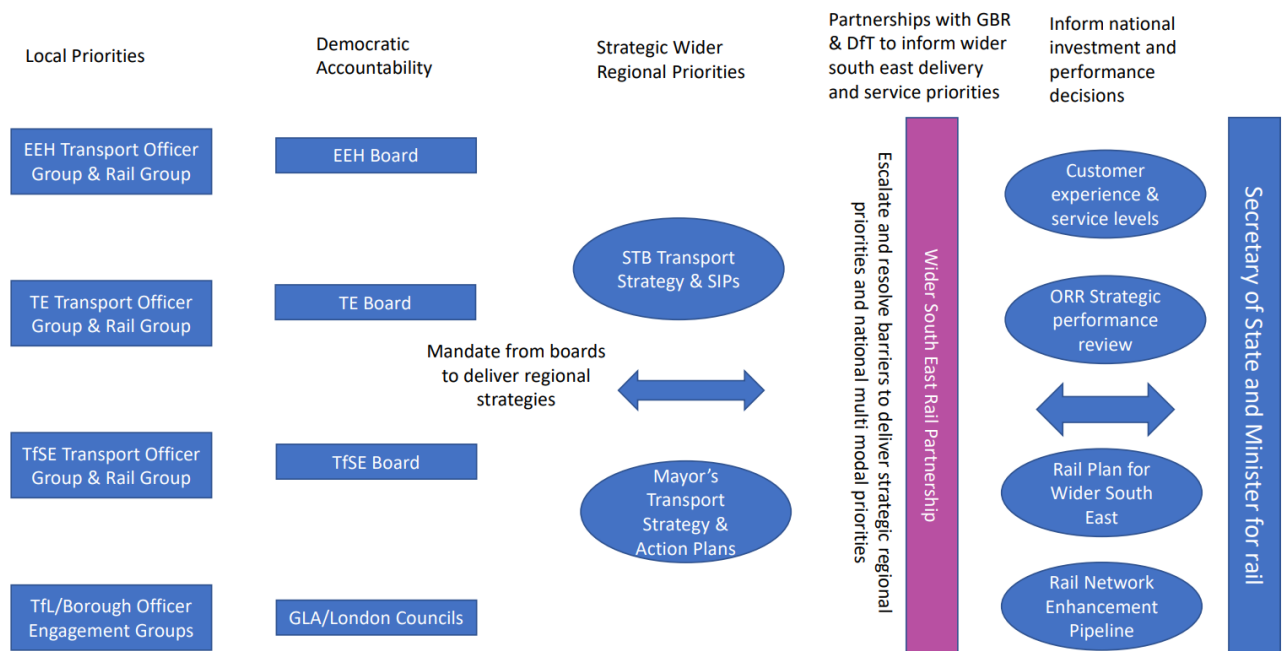
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Appendix 1: Proposed governance arrangements for the wider south east rail partnership

1. The Wider South East Rail Partnership Board would comprise:
 - Two officer representatives (Chief Officer and Technical Lead from the three wider south east sub national transport bodies)
 - Equivalent senior representatives from Transport for London
 - Senior representatives from Great British Railways Transition Team/Network Rail (GBR only once fully set up)
 - Senior representatives from Department for Transport
 - Subject experts to be drawn in as required, such as the Office of Rail Regulation.

2. The diagram below sets out how the partnership would interact with government and the STB Boards.



Appendix 2: Proposed remit of the wider south east rail partnership

1. The proposed remit of the Partnership would be:
 - To provide a coordinated view of London and the wider south east rail investment priorities and rail performance oversight to the Secretary of State for Transport informed by our Transport Strategies and Investment Pipelines
 - To provide oversight of the relationship between civic and business leadership in the wider south east and Great British Railways on strategic rail matters, informed by each of the three STBs in the wider south east: England's Economic Heartland, Transport for the south east and Transport East; and Transport for London
 - To ensure common issues and opportunities for the wider south east are taken forward consistently and with senior level engagement from Great British Railways and DfT and this is considered by agreed partnerships between Great British Railways/Network Rail (during transition) individual STB areas, GBR regions and London
 - To develop a single consistent integrated rail vision for the wider south east, drawing on each individual STB's investment plans
 - Ensure 'due regard' is taken by government, GBR/NR to regional rail priorities as decisions on investment, performance and customer experience are taken.
 - Strategic rail performance oversight:
 - o To meet and report quarterly on levels of service on wider south east railways, identifying inconsistencies that require tighter oversight and interaction, including an annual/6-monthly meeting with the Secretary of State for Transport
 - o To shape agreements for rail services that encompass the whole customer offer (passenger and freight) on rail services in the wider south east, including providing strategic advice on new franchising and timetabling arrangements
 - o To report annually to ORR on the performance of the wider south east rail network to inform their regulatory functions
 - Strategic rail planning and formal investment advice:
 - o To review evidence from GBR and advise on priorities as set out in our investment priorities, for managing rail connectivity between London and the wider south east, including crucial east west and orbital connections
 - o To review evidence on changing travel patterns in the wider south east and ensuring emerging policies are consistent with current and future trends, e.g. fares, access arrangements, etc.