

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum

12th February 2016

Agenda Item 5: Strategic Transport Proposition

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) **Commission the preparation of an overarching transport strategy, drawing on the available evidence base**
- b) **Commission work to prepare a position statement in respect of the Forum's position on the rail sector**
- c) **Support further work to explore with potential partners the development of a potential project focused on improving network resilience**
- d) **Support further work to develop the case for investment in capacity and capability for consideration by the Forum at a future meeting**

1. Context

- 1.1. The original Strategic Alliance partners (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire), having arrived at an agreement that strategic transport issues are an area in which there is added value to be realised through collaborative working, set about developing an initial proposition as to the opportunity that collaborative working at scale offered.
- 1.2. The resulting document – entitled a Strategic Transport Proposition – was submitted to Government in July 2015. The proposition was shared with Local Planning Authorities and other interested parties across the transport sector.
- 1.3. Reaction to the Proposition was broadly very supportive and encouraged the original Partners to move forward with establishing the Strategic Transport Forum – identified in the Proposition as one of the key building blocks for taking forward the strategic transport agenda.
- 1.4. The vision and scope set out in the Strategic Transport Proposition also prompted interested amongst neighbouring Local Transport Authorities – in particular Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Luton Borough and Milton Keynes Councils. Those conversations led to the authorities accepting invitations to participate in the Strategic Alliance and join the Strategic Transport Forum.
- 1.5. At the same time conversations with the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership resulted in an invitation being extended to that organisation.
- 1.6. This meeting, the first of the Strategic Transport Forum, marks another significant step forward for the Strategic Alliance initiative.

2. Strategic Transport Proposition: the potential

- 2.1. The original Strategic Transport Proposition served as a catalyst for a discussion. With the establishment of the Strategic Transport Forum it is now an appropriate time for the members of that Forum to develop its programme of work.
- 2.2. The establishment of the Strategic Transport Forum is timely given the number of initiatives and programmes of work at a national level where having a strong sub-national perspective will serve to best represent the interests of the Partners, specifically:
 - The establishment of the National Infrastructure Commission, with its remit to provide Government with advice on strategic infrastructure
 - The impending publication of the Buses Bill, with its potential to offer new options for partnership working
 - Updating by Highways England of their corridor strategies, which will in part influence future investment decisions
 - Work starting to inform the development of the second Roads Investment Strategy for Highways England
 - Work starting in the autumn on the Initial Industry Plan for the rail sector (the start of the process that will set the investment framework for Network Rail)
 - The likelihood of changes to the framework for planning and managing future infrastructure in the rail industry in light of recent independent reports.
- 2.3. At the same time there are a number of on-going projects that are of sub-national significance in which many of the Alliance Partners have an interest, including:
 - East-West Rail
 - The A1 (M25 to Peterborough) corridor study
 - East/West Expressway Study
- 2.4. A key benefit of the Strategic Transport Forum is its ability to act as the focus for a single conversation on strategic transport issues. The inclusion within the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act serves to create new opportunities for Partners to realise the long-held ambition to achieve a truly integrated end-user focused transport system.

3. Work Streams

- 3.1. In preparing the Strategic Transport Proposition, the original partners identified a number of potential areas of interest for collaborative working. Based on discussions to date it is proposed that the Forum consider the following as potential work streams.

A Transport Strategy for England's Economic Heartland

- 3.2. Developing an overarching transport strategy needs to be a key priority for the Forum, forming as it would the basis for identifying priorities that the partners would then want to have reflected in work taking place both nationally and sub-nationally.

- 3.3. A way forward would be to build upon the work that is already held locally, including work previously undertaken by the Local Transport Authorities/Bodies and that set out within the existing Strategic Economic Plans.
- 3.4. Such an approach would offer the potential of having an initial view on the overarching transport strategy by the end of the summer, enabling the partners to use it to underpin the Forum's input into the national processes referred to above.
- 3.5. It would have the added value of being available to support any update or revision of the Strategic Economic Plans, as well as potentially adding value to any future bids for funding that may be forthcoming in the near future (such as future rounds of Local Growth Fund).

Major Road Network

- 3.6. A sub-set of the work that needs to be done as part of the work to develop an overarching Transport Strategy, this topic is the subject of a separate paper on the agenda for this meeting.

Rail

- 3.7. In addition to responding to consultations on future franchises – such as the consultation on West Midlands franchise (currently operated by London Midland), there is a need for the Forum to develop its position in respect of rail – both in terms of future infrastructure requirements and franchise specifications.
- 3.8. Not only is this needed in order to input into the preparation of the Initial Industry Plan, but it will also provide the Partners with an agreed position that enables it to engage with the London Mayor who continues to seek greater influence over suburban rail services.

Network Resilience

- 3.9. In 2014 the DfT commissioned a review of network resilience in response to a series of extreme weather events that caused disruption to transport networks across the UK. Taking forward the recommendations of the Brown Review continues to be viewed as a priority by Government given the importance of improving network resilience from the perspective of business continuity.
- 3.10. Given the fact that the Alliance area contains a number of strategically important corridors – some of which are managed by national agencies, some of which are managed by Local Transport Authorities – the issue of network resilience should be seen as a priority moving forward.

Innovation in Procurement

- 3.11. A key aspect of the original Strategic Transport Proposition was the proposal to explore the opportunities for innovation in procurement that arising from working collaboratively at scale. This topic is the subject of a separate paper on the agenda for this meeting.

Investment in Capacity and Capability

- 3.12. The way of working for the Strategic Transport Forum is underpinned by the principle of collaborative working – the partners recognising the added value of using their resources in ways that complement each other whilst achieving a collective ambition for greater strategic influence. Such an approach becomes all the more important given the on-going financial pressures on Local Transport Authorities and the continued need to be cost effective in the use of the resources available.
- 3.13. In the original Strategic Transport Proposition the need for additional investment to match that being made by the Partners was identified. Specifically the Proposition identified the potential benefit to be derived from investing in accelerating the development of individual schemes and proposals to implementation stage. An indicative figure of £10m (over a 5 year period) was identified in the Proposition.
- 3.14. There is a precedent for the Government to provide additional funds in such circumstances – in the summer 2015 Budget the Treasury made £5m available to support Midlands Connect develop its transport strategy and related business cases.
- 3.15. In addition, it is worth noting that there is provision within the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill (Act) for Government to part-fund the cost of Sub-national Transport Bodies (alongside the investment made by local partners).
- 3.16. A more detailed proposition in respect of seeking additional funding needs to be developed. It is proposed that this is done with a view to submitting a proposal towards the end of 2016.

Other Areas of Interest

- 3.17. In addition to the areas set out above, there a number of other areas where there is either collaborative working underway, or the potential to develop solutions through collaboration.

Total Transport – a number of Partners are already involved in pilot studies under this initiative, with the Northamptonshire-led proposal and that led by Cambridgeshire amongst the largest supported by the Department for Transport. The pilot studies already include consideration of potential cross-boundary opportunities/linkages potentially making them of interest to the wider Forum membership.

Innovation – Milton Keynes has established a leadership in being a centre for technology-led innovation actively promoting itself as an ‘urban laboratory’. Three of the Forum Partners – Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire – are involved in an Innovate UK funded project the aim of which is to develop an open-source data platform with the aim of encouraging innovation in the development of solutions to transport problems. The scale of the Alliance area offers the Partners the opportunity to engage the innovators in the transport sector – from major motor manufacturers through to individual entrepreneurs – in ways that may not otherwise be attractive

Integrated Ticketing/Mobility as a Service - in introducing the legislative change that enables local Partners to establish a Sub-national Transport Body the Government highlighted integrated/smart ticketing as the kind of cross-boundary issue that is likely to benefit from a sub-national approach. Research undertaken by the Transport Systems Catapult has highlighted the potential for technology-led innovation to develop truly end-user focused ‘mobility services’. The Forum is potentially well placed to provide leadership in the realisation of such services.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. The original Strategic Transport Proposition identified a number of opportunities where a collaborative approach would offer added value. The Proposition acted as a catalyst for a discussion that has led to the establishment of the Strategic Transport Forum as the focus for taking forward a programme of work.
- 4.2. As a first step there is now a need for the Forum to identify its key priorities for the year ahead. In doing so it is important to consider both the changing external environment (in terms of legislation and policy) and the existence of a number of significant opportunities for Partners to influence national processes to their benefit.

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