Developing a transport strategy for the South East

Transport Forum stakeholder workshops, July 2019

To help inform the development of our transport strategy we have formed three Transport Forum working groups, bringing together:

- Local authority officers
- Business community and transport operators
- User and special interest groups.

A first round of workshops with these groups took place in January 2019, providing a wealth of valuable insight which was instrumental in shaping the development of the strategy. A second round of workshops took place in April/May and a third and final round in July

Below is a reminder of the format and key topics of discussion, along with a summary of the key outputs.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

The half-day workshops all followed a broadly similar format, with introductory presentations followed by a series of roundtable activities.

Activity 1: Future scenarios
Activity 2: Vision, goals and priorities
Activity 3: Prioritisation of interventions

ACTIVITY 1: FUTURE SCENARIOS

For the first activity, attendees were asked to consider the pros and cons of four future scenarios. These were:

- London hub
- Digital future
- Route to growth
- Sustainable future

They then discussed a proposed 'blending' of these scenarios, 'Sustainable route to growth', which aims to include the most beneficial elements of the four to

enable a growth scenario which also met our objectives around social and environmental considerations.

'London hub'
- General consensus that this scenario would represent a suboptimal future for the South East, though recognition that some elements of it are already happening
- Population growth not viable and productivity growth unrealistic
- Does underline importance of working with TfL/GLA on housing and transport
- Scepticism over whether the increase in road trips could be accommodated without the network grinding to a halt
- Growth in radial rail demand would require prohibitively expensive interventions to increase capacity

'Digital future'
- Reducing the need for business travel, in particular, seen as positive in providing additional capacity
- GVA increase with relatively limited population growth compared to London Hub welcomed
- Potential of automation to help with tackling congestion through improved virtual connectivity.
- Reduction in local journeys could lead to the death of the high street.
- Possible new sources of funding – private providers pay for use of the roads by their product.
- Concerns over whether this would lead to further inequality in market-led, unregulated scenario

'Route to growth'
- Important for the strategy to focus on employment clusters in the South East and build on their strengths. Must not ignore the rural economy.
- More sustainable increases in long distance trips than some other scenarios.
- Reduction in population growth more sustainable for local authorities.
- Importance of fundamentally changing approach to spatial planning; requires Government to change their approach.

'Sustainable future'
- Very high on the Government agenda – now being transferred to local authorities (climate emergencies etc)
- Impacts on social equalities need to be considered – lots of potential here to reduce impacts on deprived communities

Blended scenario: 'Route to sustainable growth'
- Scenario must reflect the advantages of the nature of the SE itself e.g. environmental.
- Opportunity presented to improve health and well-being as a result
- Reducing the need for business trips could lead to more discretionary travel – additional societal benefits?
- The approach to remove regional spatial planning in 2011 has had a detrimental impact – Must plan for places and public realm.

- Chosen scenario should reflect that rebalancing between London and SE is a good thing and must build on the strengths of each.
- Chosen scenario must reflect that change is taking place in the next generation – eg fewer millennials driving etc.
- Some serious concerns over rise in car use in scenarios, and the subsequent requirement for more roads. Impact on environment.
- Differing thoughts around road pricing – deemed politically difficult to do, but recognised impacts on the Treasury from reduction in VED.

ACTIVITY 2: VISION, GOALS AND PRIORITIES

For the second activity, attendees were asked for feedback and comments on the proposed vision for 2050, the goals which underpinned it and the priorities to help achieve the goals.

Vision
- Needs to be more aspirational and capture the South East's 'personality'
- Should paint a picture of what we want the South East to look like in 2050
- Does it give sufficient weight to environmental issues?
- Does it conflict with what government wants if economic growth is not highest priority?
- The importance of regulation was discussed to ensure scenario is achieved.

Goals
- Discussion around environment being the most pressing goal
- Economic, social and environment spheres are indistinguishable, and the strategy should reflect this.
- Environmental must include the importance of built environment and ensure good urban design and natural environment.

Priorities
- All must be measurable with indicators to show success in direction of progress.
- Managing travel demand was supported, with a reduction in business travel and doing business in different ways seen as equally valid.
- Urban environment needs to be specifically referenced under environmental pillar of sustainability
- Some concerns over achievability of some (eg zero fatalities)
- Behavioural change was missing and need to be considered

ACTIVITY 3: PRIORITISATION OF INTERVENTIONS

For the final activity, attendees were asked to prioritise different types of intervention over the life of the transport strategy.

While there were some differences between groups and sessions, there was broad consensus around the necessary trajectory and phasing of schemes to support a shift from 'scheme'-based interventions in the short-to-medium terms to a focus on policy and behaviour change required in the longer term.