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Dear Strategic Planning Policy Team

2026-03-26

Areas for producing spatial development strategies

We are responding on behalf of the regional branch of our national membership organisation to those parts of the consultation to which, with our specific interest, we feel that we can most usefully contribute.

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established, independent national voluntary organisation campaigning for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support sustainable economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence policy makers and decision takers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning.

1. *Which SDS area(s) are you interested in?*

Group 4: Remaining areas where we want to hear proposals for appropriate SDS geographies.

Cornwall Council, Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority, Plymouth City Council.

5. *If there is no proposed SDS area for your area of interest, we would welcome your preferred SDS area with an explanation of your reasoning.*

'The South West' is most often seen as the geography embracing the historic counties of Cornwall and Devon. That geography is however currently fragmented for spatial planning purposes across three unitary authorities and eight district authorities, giving 11 local planning authorities for a combined population of c.1.8 million. From 1st April 2026 there will at least be just three, rather than the current four, transport authorities, while the future structure for local development planning and management purposes remains to be resolved.

The South West has for the past eight years had the benefit of sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport as a 'guiding mind' for the current four (soon to be three) transport authorities in Cornwall and Devon, plus Somerset which it is now proposed to join with other current unitary authorities to its east in producing a Wessex SDS.

It therefore appears to us, as an independent organisation seeking to contribute professional observations, entirely logical to seek to reflect the scale of economic geography which Peninsula Transport recognises as desirable for strategic transport planning purposes in a single Spatial Development Strategy for 'historic' Cornwall and Devon. This policy preference acknowledges that the eventual outcomes of local government reorganisation and devolution within those currently four upper-tier local authority areas are uncertain.

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Anything less would however in our considered opinion be a sub-optimal framework for achieving properly-integrated strategic spatial and transport planning to meet the challenging socio-economic and environmental requirements of the second quarter of the 21st century.

In offering these comments we note that the Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority, with whom we liaise closely, “has submitted a formal response setting out a preference for a Peninsula wide footprint (Devon, Torbay, Plymouth, and potentially Cornwall).” – paper for agenda item 6 at its Board meeting on 30th March. Forming part of the Recommendations, we await the final outcome of that meeting with interest.

We further note, meanwhile, paragraphs 3.18 and 3.19 in that Board paper, which recognise the current fluidity in settling long-term governance arrangements, viz.:

3.18 - Should the SDS geography consist solely of Devon and Torbay, governance would sit within the DTCCA Board, supported by participation from all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), and National Park Authorities, across the area.

3.19 - If the final geography includes areas beyond the DTCCA, such as Plymouth or Cornwall, Government will establish a Strategic Planning Board to oversee production of the SDS, with membership and decision-making arrangements to reflect all constituent authorities.

We endorse what we regard as the mature, pragmatic yet principled approach being recommended for the Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority, and stand ready to continue and develop our collaboration whatever the outcome of current deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

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