

**Strategic transport issues: Potential for high level joint working in South East England**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, MAY 2011**  
**Andy Mak, Independent Consultant**

**Project objective and approach**

SEEC commissioned this scoping report to inform discussions about the potential added value of all-tier local government joint working on strategic transport issues and to gauge support from South East local authorities. Any possible joint working would need to complement, not duplicate, existing local authority relationships with Department for Transport and providers and would be much more light-touch than past arrangements such as the Transport Board. A three stage approach was used:

- i. First, gathering views from council members and officers on the possible added value of potential joint working on strategic transport issues.
- ii. Second, systematically examining and critiquing the potential form and function of possible transport high level working arrangements.
- iii. Finally, bringing together these elements in a cogent, coherent way to inform options for members to consider.

**How viewpoints and perspectives were considered**

To make sure that this scoping report gained effective input from South East local authority members and officers, views were gathered in a number of ways during March and April 2011:

- i. A questionnaire was circulated to councils to gather views and help stimulate debate on pros, cons and degree of support for joint working. Input was sought from Leaders and Chief Executives at all tiers of local government.
- ii. A discussion was held with the Directors of Economy, Environment, Planning and Transport in the upper tier authorities.
- iii. A discussion workshop was held with a number of Heads of Transport and District council officers.

Discussion was mainly focused around four key areas:

- A) Focus of possible collective joint working, including benefits and risks.
- B) Learning from past experience.
- C) Light touch strategy and resourcing.
- D) How joint working might operate?

Around 30% of SEEC member councils responded, giving all-tier feedback and particularly strong input from upper tier authorities. The views gathered from South East councils informed and shaped the conclusions and recommendations.

**Key messages and factors considered**

Key messages distilled from the wide range of local authorities' views include:

- i. A middle ground view that seems to support working on a case by case basis on issues of genuine strategic importance.
- ii. Strategic issues need to be defined but could include taking an overview of transport investment, lobbying on specific issues and attracting a fair share of national and European funding.
- iii. Prioritisation of transport schemes should be avoided.
- iv. There is no desire to recreate the previous transport board structure.

Using my specialist transport experience, I considered how some kind of joint working might potentially perform using an impact, function and form analysis, which helped to inform option design. These three key factors were:

- i. **Impact:** *Are there examples of transport issues that might be considered strategic and / or cross boundary in nature at the South East level and which could benefit from joint working?* In this area I concluded there are key transport issues where a collective approach to lobbying for funding could have benefits in attracting investment to the South East – for example working with national government and European institutions, and on particular important transport issues and projects.
- ii. **Function:** *What kind of joint working, if any, will help maximise joint local authority influence and effectiveness on strategic transport matters?* In this area I concluded there would be benefits in having a mechanism to agree a collective position on key issues to support lobbying activity. I also concluded that decisions on whether or not a transport issue should be considered at South East level should be based on the scale and / or impact that the issue is likely to have.
- iii. **Form:** *Who should be represented in any joint working arrangement to arrive at credible common positions?* In this area I concluded in addition to all tiers of local government working together, there could be benefits in bringing other partners into collective lobbying – for example working with LEPs and transport operators as required.

### Options and recommendations

Based on the evidence gathered as feedback from local authorities and my own analysis of impact, function and form, I considered three options:

- i. Option 1: No transport-specific joint working.
- ii. Option 2: An informal working arrangement with light touch terms of reference.
- iii. Option 3: An all tier standing committee with detailed terms of reference that makes recommendations to SEEC membership.

Reviewing these against the needs of SEEC and local authorities, I conclude that there are benefits and value in limited joint working on genuinely strategic transport matters. My recommended approach for any joint working is Option 2 – an informal all-tier local authority working arrangement for strategic, cross boundary issues on a case-by-case basis. This approach would be based on a light touch terms of reference to guide practical working arrangements and provide guidance on the type of strategic issues that SEEC could become involved in. The approach could be developed through SEEC's existing structures, engaging LEPs or other partners as appropriate, and would not require any additional permanent staffing – rather it would draw on member and officer expertise from local authorities as required. Such an approach would:

- i. Allow a clear set of issues to be identified and agreed by the local authorities and other partners as appropriate, e.g. LEPs, for progression in a joint but flexible way at South East level without tying them to a particular way of working.
- ii. Enable local authority members to collectively advocate shared views on investment needs and other related policy issues to decision makers including Government as appropriate.
- iii. Provide political oversight and steer for any necessary joint technical work, reducing the possibilities of wasteful and duplicative work at officer level on issues of clear strategic and cross boundary significance.
- iv. Create a mechanism for members to decide if they wish to appoint a transport lead spokesperson and / or develop a light touch strategy / lobbying document to help promote South East investment needs.