

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS ALL-MEMBER MEETING



Date: 8 November 2011

Subject: **Strategic transport debate**

Report of: Cllr David Robertson, SEEC Transport Convenor

### **Recommendation:**

Members debate and agree the next steps for SEEC's strategic transport work.

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 As SEEC Transport Convenor, I have written to council leaders asking for views on strategic transport issues where SEEC can help make the case for investment in the South East.
- 1.2 Transport infrastructure has a close link to the success of the South East economy. In some places – such as the Thames Valley – investment will help maintain global competitiveness while in others – such as the Kent coast – it will help support growth in underperforming economies.
- 1.3 Investment in the South East benefits other parts of the country too:
  - In 2009-10 the South East contributed £1 billion more to the nation's public finances than it received in grants. This 'profit' supports Government spending in other areas of the country.
  - Investment in South East transport also supports economies in the rest of the country, for example by enabling goods to reach markets via the South East's ports and airports.
- 1.4 Responses to my letter show that many members and officers favour SEEC taking a light touch approach that does not include prioritisation of individual schemes. However, some colleagues have more recently questioned the extent to which SEEC can help inform effective investment decisions by DfT without having a view on priorities. There remains no appetite or capacity for SEEC to take on detailed technical work or involvement in projects below the major schemes threshold that rightly sit with individual authorities. The debate today aims to agree next steps for SEEC's strategic transport work.

## **2. Member views to date**

- 2.1 There are a number of common themes emerging from members, highlighting the importance of transport improvements in growing or maintaining economic success:
  - The need for **better strategic rail links** to and through the South East to support economic growth. It has been suggested that SEEC could aim to influence overall funding allocations and rail franchise decisions to support:
    - Improving access to the South East's economically underperforming areas for both passengers and freight to help attract new business development to these areas
    - Delivering greater capacity for growing commuter numbers to reduce overcrowding and give better workforce access to strong economic areas

- Providing better passenger and freight rail access to ports and airports to help reduce road congestion.
- The need for **road network improvements** to reduce the economic and environmental cost of congestion, for example by:
  - Reducing bottlenecks, particularly where major trunk road routes have insufficient capacity to support economic growth, housing growth or UK-wide access to the South East's ports and airports.
- In addition to rail, the need for investment in other **alternatives to car travel**, for example:
  - Developing high quality bus networks to give access to employment markets without increasing road congestion
  - Creating strategic cycle routes to make cycling a viable alternative to travel by car or on public transport.

### **3 Next steps – questions for discussion**

3.1 I propose we focus debate around the following key questions:

- i) Do members agree with the high level issues set out in section 2? Should anything be added or deleted?
- ii) Who are the key organisations that SEEC should aim to work with or influence and how should we take this forward?
- iii) What evidence do we need to help make our case?
- iv) How can we maximise the South East voice without being drawn into individual projects or priorities?

3.2 Following today's debate I will work with SEEC officers and a network of transport professionals in member authorities to draw up an action plan to present to members at a future meeting.