

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE MEETING**



Date: 7 June 2011

Subject: **Collective working on strategic transport**

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Head of Communications
& Public Affairs

Recommendations:

- i) Discuss the pros & cons of collective working on high-level strategic transport issues, including lobbying for more transport funding in the South East
- ii) Consider options for possible joint working and agree how SEEC should address the issue
- iii) Consider a possible role for a political 'Convenor' to co-ordinate any SEEC work on transport and ensure a strong member-led agenda.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The question of strategic transport influencing was discussed at the SEEC Executive meetings in December 2010 and February 2011. Members approved an officer discussion with the Department for Transport (DfT) and then agreed to commission an independent report on potential benefits of collective working on transport.
- 1.2 An independent consultant with extensive experience of South East transport issues was commissioned to produce the report. His work included consultation with all tiers of local authorities in the SEEC area to test views on the potential benefits and appetite for joint working. Feedback was gathered via a questionnaire to all SEEC member councils, an officer workshop and a discussion with upper tier directors. A high level of input from county and unitary transport authorities was received.
- 1.3 The full report runs to 20+ pages and will be added to the SEEC website. The consultant's Executive Summary of his report is attached as annex 1.

2. Key benefit could be making the case for funding the South East

- 2.1 A very wide range of views was put forward, however a middle ground emerged around the potential benefits of developing a light touch approach to lobbying on a very limited range of issues.
- 2.2 The key benefit of any joint working and the main focus of lobbying was seen as working to attract greater transport funding and investment into the South East. There may also be a very small number of genuinely high-level and cross boundary projects or policies that members want to influence, and where a strong collective voice could be effective.
- 2.3 There were also three clear messages from local authorities about areas to avoid, setting out that SEEC should:
 - i) not recreate the former regional transport board
 - ii) not prioritise schemes on behalf of DfT
 - iii) not duplicate councils' own relationships with DfT.

3. Options for joint working

- 3.1 After reviewing feedback, the consultant considered 3 options (below) and his final recommendation is option 2.
- 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.
- 3.2 Option 2 could offer SEEC an informal way of working that does not create additional meetings or bureaucracy but still provides a route to making transport funding a regular agenda item at the SEEC Executive. Light touch terms of reference would be helpful in setting out the SEEC remit on transport to avoid concerns about duplication and other issues set out in paragraph 2.3.
- 3.3 Option 2 mentions a role for a SEEC transport spokesman. However this could be developed into a 'Convenor' role that would give a nominated SEEC member responsibility for identifying and gaining political agreement to a small number of high level issues that SEEC wants to influence.
- 3.4 A Convenor would ensure SEEC works to a member-led agenda. It would also provide a high level political representative who could work with Local Enterprise Partnership Chairmen, and other partners as appropriate, to help identify the critical investment needs that will support the South East's economic growth.
- 3.5 If members feel transport is a priority for SEEC, a Convenor could be asked to focus on issues that give a good fit with SEEC's objectives, which cover making the case for funding, supporting a global economy and acting as a strong democratic voice for the South East. In full the SEEC objectives are to:
- Strive for a fair funding deal for the South East
 - Promote the South East's position as a leading global economy
 - Act as single democratic voice for South East interests
 - Monitor the pulse of the South East.
- 3.6 In the current climate of limited resources, any officer support on transport is likely to be modest. Some support would be available from SEEC officers and we could also aim to secure some additional input from specialist officers in one or more SEEC transport authorities.
- 3.7 If members support the idea of a Convenor, this could replace the existing transport spokesman role. Nominations/ elections could take place at the SEEC AGM on 14 July 2011.