

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL TRANSPORT BOARD**

Date: 1 February 2007

Subject: **Smarter Choices**

Report of: Planning Implementation Director, Regional Assembly

Recommendations:

To seek the views of the Board on what, if any, proposals should be considered for taking forward by the Board in order to support the implementation of smarter choice measures.

Purpose of the Report:

To outline the key issues for consideration and debate by the Board.

Key Issues:

The Regional Transport Board has expressed its support for the principle of encouraging investment in Smarter Choices. The paper seeks views on whether the current funding arrangements are adequate or whether the Board should actively consider funding specific measures.

I. Context

- I.1 The idea of 'top-slicing' the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) for 'Smarter Choices' measures has been discussed previously by the Board. However, while the idea has its attractions as a principle, more detailed discussion of the proposal identifies a number of concerns, none of which are likely to be capable of easy resolution.

2. Discussion

- 2.1 It is helpful to consider the relationship of the terms 'Mobility Management', 'Smarter Choices' and 'Travel Plans' in considering the scope of this important area of transport policy.
- 'Mobility Management' may be considered as sustainable transport policy measures supporting the South East Plan's sustainable spatial strategy.
 - 'Smarter Choices' may be considered as the transport related measures that support implementation of Mobility Management policies.
 - 'Travel Plans' are one of a menu of options in the Smarter Choices 'toolkit' alongside, for example, improved transport information that can be used to deliver an effective Smarter Choices programme.
- 2.2 In this respect, Local Transport Authorities already have the ability to prioritise investment in Smarter Choices through their Local Transport Plans. The extent to which this route is being used varies across the region, reflecting in part local circumstances and opportunities. It is anticipated that the Board will wish to continue to encourage the implementation of Smarter Choices through this route. However the proposal to reinforce this encouragement through the expedient of making available funding through the RFA process requires further consideration.
- 2.3 The work of the Board to date has served to emphasise the inadequacy of the current level of funding available via the RFA. Although the region is making the strongest possible argument in favour of securing additional funding, this cannot be guaranteed.
- 2.4 In the past the Board has considered 'top-slicing' a sum for Smarter Choices. This has been explored with representatives of SEFS and also with the Regional Transport Co-ordination Group. Both bodies have largely rejected this approach due to a combination of three issues:
- The inevitable reduction of capital available to progress the remainder of the current forward programme.
 - The need to develop a bidding environment and/or complex administration process to distribute what is likely to be a relatively small sum, thus causing additional burden on bidders.
 - If a sum of money was distributed to all LTAs there is a risk of the sum being so small as to be ineffective, and also at odds with the Boards stance on alignment of funding sources.
- 2.5 This therefore raises the question as to what could be done. It is perhaps worth reflecting on the extent to which the regional prioritisation methodology enables proposals to invest in the development of alternatives to the private car to emerge as priorities for investment. The current forward programme to 2016 contains a number of schemes that fall within the Mobility Management agenda, although less so in terms 'pure' Smarter Choices work. This is mainly due to need for revenue funding to deliver these types of initiatives.

- 2.6 There are, however, examples of initiatives - such as the Department for Transport led Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns (Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester) - that could provide an example of how the RTB might develop a programme which seeks to tackle this issue. However as the current RFA is capital funding it would be hard to see how this could be achieved on the ground. There may be an opportunity to seek out partnership/alignment opportunities with other organisations - such as Cycling England - that might provide opportunities to align their capital and revenue programmes with investment decisions made by the Board.
- 2.7 The Board could also consider Smarter Choices in the wider sense, through for example, encouraging the leasing of rolling stock to further improve rail services in designated areas, or through the funding more quickly of strategic coach and bus networks at sub-regional level, such as the already prioritised Thames Valley network currently programmed for implementation towards the end of the 2011 to 2016 period. Another example could be the provision of improved transport information across the South East. Such an approach could be complimentary to the transport strategy approach and legacy for this region's contribution to the 2012 Games in London, considered elsewhere on this agenda.
- 2.8 It is also understood that the officer-level Regional TravelWise Grouping for the South East is in the process of being re-energised and the operation of this group could be more closely aligned with the officer-level Regional Transport Co-ordination Group to allow sharing of good practice across the Local Transport Authorities and national delivery agencies.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 There are a number of potential options that could be taken forward, but detailed consideration by officers from across the region points to the difficulty of running a 'top-slice' process.
- 3.2 Therefore, alternative means of delivering Smarter Choices, and the Mobility Management objectives of sustainable transport supporting a sustainable spatial strategy as detailed above could be considered by the Board in terms of meeting the challenge of effecting a step change in transport behaviour in support of the Regional Transport Strategy and wider South East Plan.

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