

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
ANNUAL MEETING**

Date: 16 July 2008

Subject: **Regional Transport Board**

Report of: Chairman of the Regional Transport Board

Recommendation:

That the Regional Assembly notes the report.

Purpose of Report:

To report on the activities of the Regional Transport Board over the past year and to identify key areas of activity for the forthcoming year.

Key Issues:

The Regional Transport Board has met four times during the past year. The main areas of activity have been:

- Monitoring of the regional programme of investment, advising Ministers of implications of cost increases associated with individual schemes and matters of programme management.
- Securing of an additional £33.5 of investment for the Thames Gateway through the Community Infrastructure Fund, advising on investment priorities for the rest of the Community Infrastructure Fund.
- Embarking upon the refresh of the regional programme of investment in anticipation of the need to update advice on Regional Funding Allocations in the latter half of 2008.
- Working with Local Transport Authorities, and other stakeholders, to develop proposals that take forward both the mobility management agenda and the development of inter-urban bus and coach services.

The focus for the coming year is to input into the Regional Funding Allocation submission, and to ensure that the region's priorities are reflected in the forthcoming Transport White Paper.

I. Review of the Past Year

- I.1 The past year has seen the Board continue to focus on working with Local Transport Authorities and the Highways Agency to deliver the agreed regional programme of investment.
- I.2 During the course of the year we have:
- Seen regional funds continue to fund construction of the:
 - A4146 Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass;
 - Phase 2 of the A2 Bean-Cobham Widening scheme;
 - A2/A282 Dartford Improvement;
 - Climbing Lanes on the M27 between Junction 11 and Junction 12;
 - Widening of the M27 between Junction 3 and Junction 4;
 - A27 Southerham-Beddingham Improvement.
 - Seen regional funds enable work to begin on:
 - A3 Hindhead Improvement;
 - Improvements to M4 Junction 11.
 - Secured an additional £33.5m worth of improvements for Thames Gateway through the Community Infrastructure Fund that will enable work to begin on:
 - Medway Strategic Bus Corridor;
 - Station improvements at Gillingham, Dartford and Northfleet;
 - A228 Ropers Lane to Grain Improvement.
 - Identified regional priorities for additional funding through Community Infrastructure Fund amounting to £125 million.
- I.3 The publication of our 'Fact Book' during the course of the year provides a summary of the 43 schemes that are currently included within the regional programme.
- I.4 We have emphasised throughout the year our growing concerns that reported increases in the cost of Highways Agency schemes risks jeopardising delivery of the region's investment priorities. There is a need to both ensure that costs are kept under control more effectively, and to challenge the scope of the proposed scheme to ensure that it meets the required objectives without over-engineering.
- I.5 In January 2008 we were pleased to welcome the Head of Transport at the Olympic Delivery Authority. The meeting gave us an opportunity for a frank exchange of views on the work of the ODA to date. I believe that there is a much better understanding on both sides of the opportunities and challenges that face the region in preparing for the 2012 Games. It is pleasing to report that subsequent engagement with the ODA has been extremely positive. Real progress is now being made with the development of detailed proposals for the Eton Dorney rowing venue. We look forward to a continuing dialogue with the ODA over the coming year.

- 1.6 A big challenge facing us in delivering the regional policy framework set out in the South East Plan and Regional Economic Strategy is realising behavioural change. The Board has worked closely with a wide range of stakeholders to identify opportunities to deliver 'smarter choices' in the region. We have helped provide leadership in moving forward proposals to deliver improved inter-urban bus and coach services in the region. And we have begun to engage more actively with the rail industry in the specification of future franchises, starting with South Central.

2. The Year Ahead

- 2.1 We have a busy year ahead. Continuing to deliver projects on the ground remains a key focus for the Board. During the course of the next 12 months we are scheduled to see regional funding enable work to begin on site to deliver:
- Improvements to the Ryde Public Transport Interchange;
 - East Kent Access Road - Phase 2.
- 2.2 Our work on updating the regional programme as part of the Regional Funding Allocation process will be a key area of activity. With cost pressures on construction projects continuing the Board will be faced with a number of difficult decisions. The key priority remains ensuring that we target the funding available to deliver planned growth across the region, thereby supporting economic growth. Our meetings in the autumn will provide the opportunity for portfolio holders from Local Transport Authorities to actively engage in the Board's deliberations. I look forward to what I am sure will be lively debates.
- 2.3 The Board's work is based on information submitted by Local Transport Authorities and the Highways Agency. Our approach to prioritisation requires clarity on the scheme and the outcomes sought. It enables us to have a detailed understanding of the region's needs. We will use this to underpin our advice on funding priorities. We will also use it as the basis for putting forward the region's case for additional funding. With the approach of another Spending Review, time spent now preparing our case will strengthen our message to Government.
- 2.4 DfT is currently embarking upon a dialogue with stakeholders on the way forward for transport investment. A Green Paper is promised shortly, with a White Paper to follow by the turn of the year. With headroom in the national budget beginning to emerge beyond 2013/14 influencing the debate on how future investment priorities are determined at a national level will be a key challenge for the Board. Once again our work at the regional level will stand us in good stead for ensuring the region's voice is fed into Government.
- 2.5 The Board has proved effective in ensuring that the region's views and priorities are understood within Government. We have made significant progress in the past year and with your continued support I know that we will continue to press the region's case effectively and robustly.

ClIr Nick Skellett, CBE
Chairman of the Regional Transport Board
30 June 2008