

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Sub-National Transport Bodies and the East of England Sub-National Transport Forum
Date of meeting:	16 March 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact Government is increasingly looking towards Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) to guide investment decisions on the major transport networks. Norfolk needs to consider how best to assert influence at national level to ensure the transport infrastructure is in place for growth and development of the county.	

Executive summary

Government sees Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) as delivering improved collective transport planning and decision making over areas larger than current transport authorities. Local partners forming a statutory STB would have direct influence over decisions that are currently within the control of government and its agencies. STBs will be able to: develop transport plans for their areas; tackle issues that are currently decided in Whitehall rather than by local councils; consider longer distance road or rail networks; and consider transport systems that cross geographical areas such as bus services and integrated ticketing. A statutory board will give greater local influence over spending decisions currently made at the national level.

Norfolk County Council is currently engaged in the non-statutory East of England Sub-national Transport Forum which is looking to provide a more joined up approach to identifying problems within the regional transport network. The chair of EDT currently represents the county council. Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk currently form the core of the area of this emerging forum. Other STBs, notably Transport for the North, Midlands Connect and England's Economic Heartland are further developed and are increasingly influencing the government agenda. All of these areas are substantially larger than that which the East of England Sub-national Transport Forum currently covers, and the geography of the current forum might not find favour with government. For Norfolk (and other counties in East Anglia) the only other potentially viable STB is the Economic Heartland, covering an area including Oxford. This however would only be a potential option should Cambridgeshire (including the Combined Authority) choose to formally sign up to it. At this stage, the tact is to put Norfolk in a position to make a well-informed decision about which, if any, STB is joined.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to:

- 1. Note the engagement of Norfolk County Council in the East of England Sub-national Transport Forum; represented by the chair of EDT.**
- 2. Consider the benefits of being a member of a Sub-national Transport Body.**

1. Proposal

- 1.1. The East of England Local Government Association organised an East of England Transport Summit on 21 December 2017 to which all upper-tier councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships and strategic partners were invited. It was agreed to form a Sub-national Transport Forum for the East of England, with a view that this could work towards the establishment of a statutory Sub-national Transport Body.
- 1.2. It is proposed that Norfolk County Council continue to be a member of the East of England Sub- national Transport Forum to engage and inform the process of moving towards an STB. Norfolk County Council would be represented by the chair of the Economic Development and Transport Committee.

2. Evidence

- 2.1. Government sees STBs as delivering improved collective transport planning and decision making over areas larger than current transport authorities. It is proposed that local partners forming a statutory STB would have direct influence over decisions that are currently within the control of government and its agencies.
- 2.2. A number of areas around England are moving towards creating STBs such as:
 - Transport for the North. This is the most advanced and has received significant investment. This covers an area from Liverpool to Newcastle.
 - Midlands Connect, stretching from Birmingham to Lincolnshire, is the next most advanced and has received some government funding.
 - England's Economic Heartland. This is currently a non-statutory forum covering an area including Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Cambridgeshire authorities participate in the forum but to date have not given commitment to becoming full members of a statutory STB.
 - Transport South East which is the newest Body and is linking the South Coast.
- 2.3. The evidence suggests there are clear benefits for Norfolk being a member of an STB. Government is strongly pushing for the creation of STBs with the potential for more powers and a stronger voice. As an example, government is currently consulting on the Major Road Network (MRN). There is likely to be a large amount of funding associated with the agreed network which STBs could be given decision-making responsibilities for. Potentially STBs could also have a strong voice in influencing decisions over the strategic (trunk) road network (A11 and A47) and over rail franchises.
- 2.4. The East of England Sub-national Transport Forum (Transport East) has recently been established. The purpose of the Forum is to provide:
 - A joint narrative and vision to influence national transport strategy, funding and decisions
 - Partnership working with the transport industry, Network Rail, airports and ports which can be effectively coordinated by Transport East so that government receives agreed messages
 - Better links between growth plans and strategies
 - Quicker progress by working with partners and taskforces in the region that already have a lot of the evidence base ready to use on strategic schemes.
- 2.5. The current forum is a non-statutory body, although there is a strong desire amongst some partners that it moves towards becoming a statutory Sub-national Transport Body, which would see it recognised by government and enable it to wield most influence over investment decisions and potentially directly secure

funding from government for transport infrastructure or the running of the body.

However, the geography of the current forum – Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex providing its core – is currently much smaller than the STBs currently forming up and which have some level of government endorsement.

- 2.6. For Norfolk, the only other contiguous STB is England's Economic Heartland. This covers a large area and is therefore likely to be acceptable to government as they look to become a statutory body. At present however the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has not committed to becoming a formal member. Unless and until it does, Norfolk could not join the Economic Heartland STB.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. There are currently no financial obligations associated with attending the East of England Sub-national Transport Forum. There is the potential that funding may be sought in the future as a contribution towards an STB, likely to be in the order of an annual subscription of £6,000 (yet to be determined).

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. There are currently no resource implications other than attending the East of England Sub-national Transport Forum. The Transport Forum meetings are arranged by the East of England Local Government Association. If Norfolk County Council decided to join an STB there may be some need for some Officer resource to support work.
- 4.2. There are potential risks if Norfolk County Council decides to not join an STB such as:
- Norfolk's voice may not be heard, as government will be listening to larger bodies with a stronger voice, resource and support
 - Work could be undertaken around Norfolk that could impact on Norfolk but that the county would have no control over
 - Norfolk would be competing with areas such as Transport for the North for funding which contains multiple cities, LEPs and local authorities
 - Norfolk's population and GVA would seem insignificant when compared to areas with STBs.
- 4.3. On the other hand there are potential risks if Norfolk County Council does decide to join an STB such as:
- Norfolk's voice may be lost in a larger body
 - There may be more focus towards London connections
 - Norfolk may be in an STB with areas that have no geographical similarities
 - Norfolk may be in competition with areas with large populations and cities
 - Powers and decisions may be given to the STB which may then have decision making powers over Norfolk.

5. Background

- 5.1. Under the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 Government made provision for STBs to advise transport ministers on investment priorities in their own areas and on strategic transport schemes to boost growth. Functions of an

STB include: the preparation of a transport strategy for the area; providing advice to the Secretary of State; and to co-ordinate the carrying out of transport functions in relation to the area.

- 5.2. Government sees STBs as delivering improved collective transport planning and decision making over areas larger than current transport authorities. It is proposed that local partners forming a statutory STB would have direct influence over decisions that are currently within the control of Government and its agencies. STBs will be able to develop transport plans for their areas, tackle issues that are currently decided in Whitehall rather than by local councils, consider longer distance road or rail networks, and consider transport systems that cross geographical areas such as bus services and integrated ticketing. A statutory board will give greater local influence over spending decisions currently made at the national level.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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