

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 4 March 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Transport for the South East's (TfSE) - Transport Strategy Refresh 2025

Purpose: TfSE has launched a consultation on the refresh of their draft Transport Strategy 2025. This report summarises the key elements of the strategy and highlights the key areas in the County Council's proposed response.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Cabinet is recommended to consider and approve the County Council's draft response on Transport for the South East's formal consultation on their draft Transport Strategy 2025 as summarised in paragraphs 2.9 to 2.13 of this report and outlined in more detail at Appendix 3.

1. Background

1.1 Transport for the South East (TfSE) is the sub-national transport body (STB) for the South East of England. Established in 2017, TfSE is made up of sixteen upper tier authorities including Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Medway, Portsmouth, Southampton, Surrey and West Sussex and the six Berkshire authorities. The TfSE geography is shown at Appendix 1.

1.2 In 2020, TfSE adopted their first Transport Strategy with the intention to refresh it every five years. This refreshed transport strategy has been updated to reflect a review of the evidence base, national and local policy changes; intensified decarbonisation efforts, post-Brexit trade dynamics, and shifts in travel behaviour due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.3 A public consultation on the refreshed Transport Strategy started on 10 December 2024 and closes on 7 March 2025. The consultation seeks the views of stakeholders on the draft refreshed Transport Strategy, alongside the supporting Integrated Sustainability Appraisal.

1.4 Following the consultation, TfSE will produce a consultation report on the draft Transport Strategy that will summarise responses and outline how the strategy has been updated. The draft final Transport Strategy will be considered by the TfSE Partnership Board and submitted to Government in October 2025.

1.5 The Strategic Investment Plan (SIP), which provides a framework for delivering the TfSE Transport Strategy by outlining the structure for investment in strategic transport infrastructure, services and regulatory interventions, will be updated during 2025/26.

2. Supporting information

TfSE Transport Strategy 2025 – summary key points

2.1 Transport for the South East's mission is "to grow the South East's economy through a safe, sustainable, and integrated transport system that enhances residents' quality of life and protects the environment".

2.2 The refreshed TfSE Transport Strategy continues the shift away from traditional approaches of planning transport infrastructure and services for a future based on recent trends and forecasts to an approach of choosing a preferred future and setting out a plan for how this can be achieved. This change in approach would see a transition away from 'planning for vehicles' towards 'planning for people and places'. This approach is consistent with the recently adopted East Sussex Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) in October 2024.

Vision, Goals and Priorities

2.3 The draft Strategy vision, whilst similar to the previous Transport Strategy vision, has been updated to highlight ‘for the South East to offer the highest quality of life for all and be a global leader in achieving sustainable, net zero carbon growth’. It also continues to be underpinned by three strategic goals – economy, society and environment.

Principles and Strategy Approach

2.4 TfSE has developed a framework that applies a set of refreshed principles to identify strategic issues and opportunities in the South East in order to help achieve the vision of the Transport Strategy. More information is outlined in Appendix 2 with the six principles that underpin the strategy being:

- **Vision and validate** – The East Sussex LTP4 refers to this principle as ‘planning for people and places’.
- **Triple access planning** – considers transport, digital and social factors.
- **Movement and Place** – balancing the needs of movement with creating vibrant, liveable spaces.
- **User Hierarchy** – prioritising pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport over cars (as does LTP4).
- **Avoid – Shift – Improve** – a strategy to reduce transport carbon emissions.
- **Environmental Net Gain** – should leave the environment better off than before.

2.5 LTP4 embraces the above principles as part of its strategy. The notable difference is that we do not explicitly state “avoid – shift – improve”. LTP4 is about providing choice, and we acknowledge that some choices will not necessarily meet the decarbonisation aspirations, at least in the short-term.

2.6 To support the realisation of the vision, TfSE have prioritised five missions. Each mission has a statement and context, outcomes, priorities (including short- and longer-term as appropriate) and it outlines what success will look like. More information is outlined in Appendix 2 with the five missions being:

- **Strategic connectivity** - regional transport corridors and access to transport and services.
- **Resilience** - reliable and smooth journeys for all users.
- **Inclusion and integration** - inclusive, affordable, and integrated transport network.
- **Decarbonisation** - leading the South East towards a net zero transport future by 2050.
- **Sustainable growth** - unlock investment, to create healthy and vibrant connected communities.

Transport Strategy relationship with Devolution proposals

2.7 Since the publication of the draft Transport Strategy for consultation, the Government has set out its plans for devolution and the re-organisation of local government in England in its White Paper published on 16 December 2024. Clearly this is a fast moving picture but the Council, in its Cabinet decision on 9 January 2025, confirmed its clear commitment to devolution and local government reorganisation as part of the Devolution Priority Programme, based on a proposal for the devolution of powers to a new combined authority for the Sussex area covering the areas of West Sussex, Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, and a move towards unitarisation at these three geographies.

2.8 Therefore the final TfSE Transport Strategy will need to be increasingly cognisant to the potential introduction of a combined Mayoral Authority for Sussex (East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove), alongside other combined Strategic Authorities across its geography during the Strategy’s life, and the powers and responsibilities that such authorities would have around transport and local infrastructure as well as other areas of competence which inter-relate with the TfSE Transport Strategy’s delivery (e.g. housing and strategic planning; economic development & regeneration; employment and skills; environment & climate change; health & wellbeing)

ESCC Response to draft Strategy

2.9 Overall we welcome the publication of the revised TfSE Transport Strategy. Its vision, strategic goals and priorities are supported and these align well with the priorities set out in the Council Plan, East Sussex LTP4 2024-2050 and East Sussex Prosperity Strategy 2024-2050.

2.10 A copy of the draft proposed Council response to the consultation questions is set out in Appendix 3. In summary the response highlights that:

- We agree with the key challenges
- There is a need for these challenges to be tackled across national, regional and local levels.

Vision and Goals

- We welcome the refresh of the vision and goals and these strongly align with the East Sussex LTP4.
- We also agree with the inclusion of the three pillars of sustainable development - economic, environment and social.
- We highlight the opportunity to strengthen the opportunities in relation to economic growth, specifically culture and tourism (e.g. Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP))

Missions

- General agreement with the five missions - align with the East Sussex LTP4 objectives and the recently published draft National Transport Strategy.
- We approve that each mission provides a structured route map that sets out the way forward for its delivery.
- Suggest that TfSE consider highlighting the opportunities of their role in supporting local transport authorities and strategic transport partners in delivering these missions.
- In regard to each of the missions, the draft response highlighted the following inclusions, suggestions and recommendations:
 - 'Strategic connectivity' mission
 - Need to refer to the emerging themes from the draft Integrated National Transport Strategy.
 - Need to reference the opportunities for longer distance travel using cycle networks, as referred to in the draft TfSE Regional Active Travel Strategy.
 - Welcome the inclusion of 'reinstating international rail services from Ebbsfleet and/or Ashford to relieve capacity at St Pancras' and 'Planning for long term improvements by safeguarding critical areas and aligning planning policies'.
 - Refers to the need for 'expanding rail capacity to support growth at Gatwick airport.' This mission should reference the need for improving the modal share of travel by sustainable travel to and from Gatwick. This amendment to the mission wording should include rail capacity and is irrespective of the Secretary of State's pending decision on the Gatwick Northern Runway proposal.
 - 'Resilience' mission
 - Welcome recognition of resilience of the network as - aligns with the inclusion of this within East Sussex LTP4 as a key objective.
 - Welcome the acknowledgement of the impacts of coastal erosion and flooding on the county's transport networks.
 - Suggest referencing the impacts of climate change being experienced in the UK (hotter, drier summers, flash flooding etc.).
 - Inclusion and integration mission
 - Welcome the inclusion of this mission - it underpins East Sussex LTP4 but suggest that there is greater clarification provided on the roles and responsibilities between TfSE and local authorities and partners.
 - Decarbonisation mission
 - Support this mission – aligns with East Sussex LTP4's objective on the decarbonisation of transport.
 - Greater recognition of the role of freight in achieving this mission (e.g. first/last mile and consolidation centres and decarbonised vehicle fleets).
 - Further details on the carbon budgets - what and how much should be referenced
 - Short-term priorities for decarbonisation should include a priority on affordable electric vehicle charging solutions.
 - Sustainable growth mission
 - Whilst supportive we suggest the mission reflects the changes set out in the Government's White Paper on devolution in England on 16 December 2024, to local authorities in delivering accountability and economic growth.
 - The need for referencing an 'Infrastructure first' approach (in relation to the development and delivery of local plan (housing and employment)
 - Highlight the need for a review of how funding is allocated to support timely delivery of infrastructure and services.

- Suggest Investment priorities should be re-ordered (connectivity, then cost/affordability and then quality and frequency of services).
- Suggest that the key priorities map includes additional opportunities for infrastructure improvements in East Sussex; the A22 growth corridor (Uckfield to Eastbourne) is included as a particular focus for housing and employment growth.

Global Policy Interventions

- Support the inclusion of these interventions, however, suggest that greater opportunities for the delivery of freight are included.

Delivery

- Welcome a specific section focussed on delivery of the strategy and TfSE's role. However, suggest that there needs to be recognition that the delivery of strategy is largely reliant on the partnerships and contribution (including funding opportunities) of local transport authorities, local planning authorities, strategic transport partners and other localised partners.
- A need to highlight the proposed changes, powers and responsibilities that will likely come forward in the short- to medium-term as reflected in the Government's recent Devolution in England White Paper, as outlined in paragraphs 2.7 and 2.8 of this report as well as the commentary under the 'sustainable growth' mission.
- The need for an 'Infrastructure First' approach and the review of how funding is allocated to deliver infrastructure required to support sustainable growth.
- Highlight partnership working with local transport authorities and other partners in delivery, where plans and strategies share common goals, visions and objectives/missions.
- Reference the current role of local transport and highway authorities in setting priorities for strategic connectivity, in relation to the road and rail network alongside National Highways and Network Rail/Great British Railways.
- It will be important for TfSE to support local authorities and other partners in securing funding. This support will ensure a pipeline development of schemes which will be vital to enable these to progress quickly through the business case development process. Thereby realising the vision and goals of TfSE and partner strategies in the shortest timeframe.

Indicators

- We agree with the inclusion of the indicators, it would be beneficial to include reference to the data sources that will be used to monitor these to provide long-term monitoring and reporting confidence. This is alongside ensuring that the outcomes of these are publicly reported.

Integrated Sustainability Assessment (ISA)

- Equalities has been assessed within the ISA, alongside health. There is also a specific document on "engagement with EDI [equalities, diversity and inclusion] and socially excluded groups".
- We welcome the ISA. From an equalities perspective, there are a number of discrepancies associated with some of the equalities terminology used. For example, those with a disability..." should read 'disabled people', 'the elderly...' should read 'older people'. Also request that the Health Impact Assessment is presented as a stand-alone document.

General comments

2.11 Stronger emphasis on the natural environment. There is limited reference to the opportunities for the protection and conservation of the environment.

2.12 Stronger emphasis on health benefits, particularly around integrated active travel and importantly the integration of healthy planning as a key component of spatial planning.

2.13 The key challenge to the Strategy's delivery will be the level of funding, both capital and revenue, that will be available over the life of the strategy. There needs to be greater certainty on the level of government funding that will be available over the longer-term to enable effective planning of strategic infrastructure and initiatives. TfSE's role in lobbying Government for long term and consistent funding levels for constituent authorities LTPs will be fundamental. The government's devolution proposals may, in part, provide the longer-term funding certainties that will support the delivery of the Transport Strategy at a local authority and strategic combined authority level.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The delivery of the TfSE's refreshed transport strategy provides an opportunity to support and grow the economy, boost connectivity and speed up journeys whilst improving access to opportunities for all and protecting and enhancing our region's unique environment. As it is finalised, it will also need to be cognisant of the fast-moving picture arising from the devolution and local government reorganisation proposals for East Sussex, the proposed combined Mayoral Authority for Sussex as well as other parts of its geography.

3.2 TfSE has set out their overall approach to achieving their vision in their draft Transport Strategy which is out for consultation. Overall, the County Council is supportive of TfSE's draft revised strategy. A summary of our response to the consultation is set out in paragraphs 2.9 – 2.13 of this report and outlined in more detail in Appendix 3, which would form the basis of the County Council's formal response. The Transport Strategy if adopted by TfSE and its constituent authorities, will support the delivery of our East Sussex Local Transport Plan 4 2024 – 2050 and have a significant benefit on people living and working across the County.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All Members

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None