

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 24 September 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

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

Purpose: To demonstrate East Sussex County Council's support for TfSE's Transport Strategy Refresh 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) note the updated refreshed TfSE Transport Strategy 2025; and**
- 2) note the continued support from East Sussex County Council towards the refreshed strategy as a constituent authority of TfSE's geography.**

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. Their 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 closed on 7 March 2025. The consultation sought the views of stakeholders on the draft refreshed Transport Strategy, alongside the supporting Integrated Sustainability Appraisal. East Sussex County Council submitted a formal response in March 2025 which was approved by Cabinet on 4 March.

1.4 Following the consultation, TfSE have updated the strategy following all the feedback received. The draft final Transport Strategy has been considered by the TfSE Partnership Board on 21 July 2025 and is expected to be submitted to Government in October 2025.

1.5 The TfSE 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 East Sussex Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) which was adopted 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, to help achieve the vision of the Transport Strategy. The six principles that underpin the strategy are:

- 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 which has also been reflected in the East Sussex LTP4.
- 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 The East Sussex 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. 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 TfSE Transport Strategy for consultation, the Government set out its plans for devolution and the re-organisation of local government in England in its White Paper published on 16 December 2024 followed by the recent Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill released in July 2025. The updated strategy includes several references to this changing policy across both the Sussex and Solent geographies. For East Sussex this sets out our inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme and the establishment of a new Sussex Mayoral Combined County Authority covering the areas of West Sussex, Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, which is referred to as the Sussex Strategic Authority. On the 17 July 2025, Central Government gave its approval to the establishment of a Sussex MCCA.

2.8 However, with changes emerging at a fast pace the County Council will continue to work in partnership with TfSE to ensure that the strategy and schemes for East Sussex, included in the TfSE SIP is cognisant with the introduction of a Sussex MCCA.

2.9 This will specifically be in relation to the powers and responsibilities that the new Sussex MCCA will have, focussed on 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). This will be pertinent in relation to transport with the priorities for the wider Sussex geography being set by the new Mayor eventually through the development of a joint Local Transport Plan across the Sussex Mayoral geography.

2.10 The refreshed TfSE Transport Strategy aligns with the East Sussex LTP4. This alignment, places East Sussex in a strong position to promote the transport priorities of the county to the Sussex MCCA and influence the development of the Sussex MCCA Local Transport Plan when it comes into effect. Importantly this will support ESCC's ability to secure funding for transport schemes and interventions that support the East Sussex LTP4 and the TfSE Transport Strategy and supporting documents.

2.11 In addition to these emerging changes the DfT has recently decided to consolidate funding in the Local Transport Grant. Given this funding it will be for local leaders to take the lead in taking forward regional collaboration in the way they choose and that best suits them. The DfT have confirmed funding will cease to STBs in March 2027. This transport strategy will enable local leaders to make the case for transport investment going forward and it will be for local leaders to determine the future for STBs after March 2027.

TfSE Transport Strategy Consultation responses

2.12 Overall 811 responses were received to the consultation by TfSE, with 742 from individuals and 69 from organisations.

2.13 As highlighted in paragraph 1.3, the East Sussex response was approved at Cabinet on 4 March 2025 and submitted via email on 5 March 2025. Our response would have been considered alongside the other 810 responses.

2.14 TfSE produced a report for their Partnership Board meeting on 21 July 2025 that provided an update on the strategy refresh including a consultation report and updates to the strategy as a result of feedback received. A copy of the report is available at [Partnership Board - Transport for the South East](#) – agenda item 8.

2.15 At the meeting of TfSE Partnership Board on 21 July 2025, the proposed changes to the refreshed Transport Strategy and Integrated Sustainability Appraisal to reflect the feedback received in response to the public consultation were agreed. The refreshed Transport Strategy is due to return to the Partnership Board again in October 2025 for its final approval.

3 Conclusion and 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. Whilst it is now finalised, it will also need to continue to be cognisant of the fast-moving picture arising from the devolution and local government reorganisation proposals for East Sussex, and the new Sussex Mayoral Combined County Authority as well as other parts of its geography.

3.2 Cabinet is recommended to consider the County Council's continued support for TfSE's Transport Strategy as a constituent member of the sub-national transport body.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All Members

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- East Sussex County Council Cabinet 4 March 2025 ([Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 4th March, 2025, 10.00 am | East Sussex County Council](#) – item 7)
- TfSE Partnership Board 21 July 2025. Copies of updated documents are online at [Partnership Board - Transport for the South East](#) –item 8. We are unable to confirm that the PDF or webpage is accessible, as the authors are not East Sussex County Council. Any users who are unable to access the documents and/or require the information in an alternative or accessible format should contact Transport for the South East directly by calling 0300 3309574 or emailing tfse@eastsussex.gov.uk.