

TFSE consultation: Full response by Slough Borough Council - June 2019

Page 1. Executive Summary

Slough Borough Council supports the proposal in principle to establish Transport for the South East as a sub-national body.

1.2. We share the commitment to support and grow the economy through integrated transport projects, to improve connectivity, speed up journeys and also to protect and enhance the environment in the region. All of these aims tally with Slough's priorities, and indeed with the essential three pillars of sustainability (Economy, Society, Environment).

1.4. We endorse the importance of collaboration and recognise the success of the LEPS.

1.8. We recognise the need to influence national government, invest in pan-regional strategic corridors, plan effectively, and support jobs, housing and growth.

1.9. We endorse the commitment to establish powers proportionate and additional to the existing powers of the relevant authorities.

Page 2. The Ambition

2.1. On powerful and effective partnership, bringing together 16 local transport authorities, 5 LEPs etc: Whilst we agree with the intentions and some level of success to date, Slough Borough Council considers that TFSE has not yet sufficiently involved and considered the needs, requirements and priorities of all local authorities. The Berkshire Local Authorities have not received the same attention and consideration as the larger county authorities in the group.

2.2. Again, as in 1.2, Slough BC thoroughly supports the delivery of a high quality, sustainable and integrated transport system, focusing on increased productivity, improved safety and quality of life, and protection for the environment. However, regarding the reference here to 'natural and historic' environment. SBC calls for greater inclusivity, since environmental concerns in urban towns are equally important in terms of public health and social equity across the whole region.

2.3 Achieving the TFSE vision by 2050, including growing GVA to £500bn and creating 3m new jobs, is ambitious but a target that we are happy to support.

2.4. The proposal refers to “collective views on schemes such as southern and western rail access to Heathrow”.

In Slough’s opinion, there has been insufficient consideration of, and engagement with, Heathrow and the transport implications for both the South East region and Heathrow Airport Ltd. Considerably more needs to be done by TFSE to understand the full implications and opportunities relating to transportation across the boundary between the TFSE and Heathrow Airport.

See further comments sections 3.3, 3.5, 3.16, 5.1, Table 1,

2.6. The proposal refers to powers and functions ‘necessary to deliver our strategy and achieve our vision’. Also the ‘different geographic, economic, political, social and environmental characteristics.

In SBC’s opinion, not all local authority areas have been given the same level of consideration to date. Greater engagement with Slough and fellow Berkshire local authorities is requested.

Page 3. The Strategic Economic Case

3.1 and 3.2. Regarding the importance of the region to economic success in the UK: Slough Borough Council considers that the economic contribution to the region by Slough and more widely Berkshire has not been fully recognised within the proposal and related information provided by TFSE. In particular, the Trading Estate in Slough, and the overall level of commercial activity in the town, along with contributions across Berkshire, is vast. Reference to this contribution would be welcomed, and included in all further TFSE discussions on regional strengths and opportunities.

3.3. Reference is made to Heathrow airport.

As noted in SBC’s response to sections 2.4, 3.5, 3.16, 5.1, Table 1, Slough BC considers that the impact of Heathrow and potential developments, both alongside and across the TFSE regional border is potentially huge. Existing and future growth have not yet been adequately explored by TFSE.

3.4 Reference is made to the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union. In the light of ongoing political difficulties in agreeing an exit solution, there is still a possibility that the UK will remain within the EU. Hence, TFSE must be prepared to consider all possible scenarios, and make plans for all eventualities.

3.5. Again, there is only a passing, generalised reference here to the importance of Heathrow airport. Whilst noting that this is a high level point, we maintain that there has been insufficient focus on Heathrow.

Slough BC would welcome the opportunity, perhaps in partnership with Heathrow Airport Ltd, to make a formal presentation to TFSE on the impact of the airport and the implications for growth within Slough and beyond across the region.

See further comments sections 2.4, 3.3, 3.16 5.1, Table 1,

3.6. The proposal refers to the 'highlights' across the region. We recognise the importance of these locations and assets. However, this paragraph omits to mention the urban areas (e.g. Berkshire towns), which in many people's opinions can also be considered 'amazing places to live, work and visit'. If we are going to have a truly equitable regional partnership, all areas must be included and valued.

Page 4. The scale of the challenge and why change is needed

3.8. With reference to transport infrastructure spending per head, we fully support the call for increased investment, particularly in those areas in the region where such investment is likely to lead to the most effective growth. The Thames Valley area, including Slough, is a prime example here.

3.10. This point refers to lack of adequate transport infrastructure to help deliver new housing and access to transport and education. This again is a concern throughout the entire south east region, not just isolated areas. Population growth in busy urban areas intensifies the call for housing development, with limited land available for development. TFSE must include plans for cross-region coordination and cooperation, with other local authorities that are in the south east but not in TSFE.

3.11. Linked to the above (3.10), Slough BC fully recognises that the challenges go beyond administrative and political boundaries and that it will be challenging to create effective

connectivity into and across the region, with the ultimate aims of growing the economy, improving people's lives, and, we would add, improving social equity and public health.

Page 5. The powers to achieve our vision

3.12. Slough BC supports the proposal to establish TFSE with all the appropriate powers, for example equivalent to those of a mayoral combined authority, however any proposal to create e.g. a new role of mayor for the region would not need close scrutiny and would not necessarily be supported.

3.13. Slough BC supports the proposal on complementary powers. Further, we consider it essential to ensure that TFSE's powers build on the existing powers of local authorities, operate concurrently with them and will require consent of the relevant constituent authorities.

3.14. Regarding strategic influence, TFSE must be prepared to work alongside all significant partners, not just Network Rail and Highways England but potentially organisations such as Heathrow Airport Limited and any similar bodies operating adjacent to or otherwise in connection with the region. This is also ties up with the proposal's reference to cross boundary working (which must include working with local authorities not within the region).

Page 5. TFSE as a statutory body

3.15. SBC supports (and considers essential) a strong TFSE voice with clear priorities and ability to influence the Government and other key stakeholders.

3.16. The call for TFSE to facilitate the delivery of jobs, housing and growth is endorsed by Slough BC. The proposal refers to engagement, including with TfL. Again, as above, Slough BC would advocate extensive engagement with Heathrow Airport Ltd and all other appropriate bodies and organisations.

See further comments sections 2.4, 3.3, 3.5, 5.1, Table 1,

3.17. On benefits for the travelling public, Slough BC fully supports the proposal here, with particular reference to 'integrated travel solutions'. The call for increased development and implementation of smart ticketing also complements Slough PC's own policies in this area; the overall objective being to deliver genuine, multi-modal, sustainable, integrated transport.

As well as developing long term, sustainable transport infrastructure throughout the south east region, TFSE must be mindful of and develop strategies to help take advantage of the benefits offered by Travel Demand Management (TDM), with a focus on reduction in travel where appropriate. This requires the development of non-travel options, increasingly drawing on technological developments. The conventional essential link between land-use planning and transport has effectively now become a triangular relationship involving digital technology as the third core contributor to the overall solution.

Further, in all of these areas, TFSE must focus on solutions that genuinely meet the needs of the region most effectively, and contribute best to the shared objectives of TFSE and all participating authorities and organisations. This will inevitably involve innovative approaches and responses to problems which have all too commonly resulted in road infrastructure investment in recent decades.

3.18. Slough BC welcomes TFSE's commitment to provide 'a clear, prioritised view of investments agreed by all the South East's local transport authorities'.

Page 7. Constitutional Arrangements

4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. Slough BC endorses the name, membership and the overall partnership board arrangements for the new sub-national body.

4.6. However, with reference to co-opted members, we would like to have more information on the people or organisations likely to be appointed or represented on the board.

Page 8. Proceedings

4.9. Slough BC agrees with the principle of working by consensus, but we would like to know exactly how TFSE proposes to resolve any disputes or disagreements where consensus is not achievable.

4.10. The proposal refers to no single authority having a veto on any decision. However, there appears to be potential for conflict here between individual authority powers (specified in section 3.13) and the overall regional 'consensus' approach. Further clarification is needed here, with confirmation that local authorities will genuinely be able to object to (and

prevent the implementation of) any decision or scheme not considered right for that local authority area. This right could be regarded as a 'veto', and yet the TFSE plans to resolve issues where there is no consensus with a non-veto approach. In practice, it may be unlikely that a single local authority, or even multiple authorities will be in dispute with the regional approach, but such a possibility must be acknowledged with confirmation of all legal and procedural rights, obligations and opportunities.

4.11. The voting option based on population may seem the simplest approach, however Slough BC notes that other factors are relevant here, including the contribution of any given authority to overall growth within the region. The biggest contributions may come from the local authority areas with small populations, for example within the Thames Valley. Hence it may be appropriate to consider alternative voting rights and procedures.

4.12. The proposal sets out more detail on consensus and vetoes, but again, as stated above, the proposal appears to allow a scenario where individual authorities will not ultimately have the power to object, and to prevent actions or schemes that may not be considered desirable or appropriate by those authorities, if the majority view within TFSE is of a contrary opinion.

Page 9. Scrutiny, Standing Orders, Miscellaneous, Funding

4.15 to 4.22 Slough BC supports the proposals in this section. No specific comments to add here.

Page 10. Governance

4.23 to 4.26 There is a clear need here to ensure equality of opportunity for representation at all levels of governance within TFSE. More information is requested on the processes and procedures likely to be introduced here, with particular reference to how all authorities will have genuine opportunities to be involved.

Page 11. Functions

General functions

5.1. Slough BC agrees with the functions specified in points a) to e). We would add a further point, i.e. the need to engage with other organisations which may not geographically lie within the TFSE region, but can be considered stakeholders in terms of impacts and contributions on a cross-regional basis. This would include Transport for London, Heathrow Airport Ltd and other any other relevant organisations or authorities of a similar stature. *See further comments sections 2.4, 3.3, 3.5, 3.16, Table 1,*

Local transport functions

5.5. We repeat our support for concurrent powers and the requirement for consent by local authorities (3.13); also our concern over the potential conflict here with the determination not to allow an effective veto (section 4.12)

Table 1. Proposed powers and responsibilities

The various references to rail franchises and developments in this table strengthen the argument supported by Slough BC that TFSE must engage more comprehensively with all stakeholders and organisations involved. Little has been said elsewhere in this TFSE proposal relating to the Western Rail Access to Heathrow and the Southern Rail Access to Heathrow projects.

Highways

Slough BC welcomes a 'strong formal role in roads investment' for TFSE, which will influence RIS strategy. However, the voice of individual local authorities affected by any roads investment project or proposal must still be heard and responded to.

Similarly, with reference to TFSE's proposal on entering into agreements to undertake certain works on the SRN, MRN or local roads, again any decisions made must take full account of the wishes and decisions made by the specific local authorities responsible for the areas affected.

The same applies to highway construction and construction of footpaths and bridleways.

This whole area of policy and intention relates to the issue of consensual approach and possible conflict with individual authority wishes (3.13, 4.12 and 5.5). Further clarity is sought here on the legal and procedural implications.

On capital grants, it is recommended that provision is made for constituent authorities to be awarded funding for transport enhancements that may cross authority boundaries, as well as within specific local authority areas. Agreements with neighbouring authorities (either within or outside of the south east region) would, of course, need to be carefully drawn up.

The same principle applies to the provision of bus services, partnerships and franchises. Bus services are not confined to geographical boundaries, and may well cross regional boundaries.

This also applies to integrated ticketing. Clarification on the powers and guidelines relating to these points is requested.

Air Quality

The proposal on establishing clean air zones is welcomed by Slough BC. However, elsewhere in the proposal document, there is little detailed reference to this subject, only generalised statements on the environment. Slough BC calls for more focus, with more detailed commitment, to be included in the TFSE plans.

Other powers

This is yet one more area which relates to potential conflict between TFSE / regional decisions and policies and those of individual member authorities, who may be in disagreement with the wider regional view. Once again, clarity must be provided on the extent of the powers to be granted here, for all parties involved.

Page 16. Powers and responsibilities not being sought.

5.6. All noted and understood. However, regarding consultation, for cross-boundary (authority or region) projects and proposals, it might well be beneficial for TFSE to lead on this or perhaps to supplement, or at least endorse local authority measures, where appropriate.

Page 17. Support and Engagement

6.1 to 6.5. All noted and agreed.

Page 18. Appendix 1. Distribution of votes

The table shows no votes for each of the six Berkshire unitary authorities, and 6 votes for the Berkshire Local Transport Body. This is consistent with previous correspondence with the Thames Valley LEP. It is understood that the Berkshire group will collectively have 6 votes, but only one seat on the board. Slough continues to support this original proposal, i.e. to join TFSE as both a constituent member and as part of the Berkshire group.

What is not clear in this table is what happens should any individual constituent member withdraw from the Berkshire group at any point in the future. Confirmation is requested on whether the authority will automatically be granted an individual vote. Clarification is also required on whether or not that individual member authority will also be granted a seat on the TFSE board.