

MEETING OF THE BERKSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT BODY (BLTB) – THURSDAY 9 MARCH 2023

CONTACT OFFICER: Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Slough Borough Council

Item 9: Future role and format of BLTB and BSTF

Purpose of Report

1. To outline the way in which the role and function of the Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB) might evolve and present the options that were considered by the Place Making Board as to how BLTB could function and be resourced from April 2023.

Recommendation

2. You are recommended to note the options for future support of the BLTB and BSTF and to agree to the proposed arrangements to be put in place by Slough Borough Council from April 2023 onwards.

Background Information

3. Following its establishment in December 2011 Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (Berkshire LEP) has received Government Core Grant funding to provide a strategic economic view on transport and infrastructure. As a result, Berkshire LEP plays a strategic role in advocacy and promotion of infrastructure interventions that enhance connectivity and support the Berkshire economy. This has enabled the LEP to support and oversee the work of the BLTB and BSTF and to invest £135m of delegated Local Growth Fund (LGF) and locally secured Business Rates Retention Pilot (BRRP) monies in transport projects across Berkshire. The foundations built will be of value if the area decides to pursue a devolution deal, in line with the Levelling Up White Paper published in February 2022 which said all geographies wishing to have a devolution deal would have one by 2030. The allocation of devolved funds for Transport and Infrastructure features in those County Deals agreed so far.
4. A change of policy direction in Government in 2020/21 saw the move to centrally held funding for future infrastructure and transport projects which are open to local authorities to bid for in competitions such as the Levelling Up Fund Rounds 1 and 2 with a 3rd Round promised. As such the requirement for the 38 LEPs to provide infrastructure and transport strategic support has been wound down and at the end of 2021/22 Government reduced the level of Core Grant and ceased requiring LEPs to deliver on this activity other than oversight and monitoring of LGF/GBF projects to completion.
5. In 2022/23 the six Berkshire local authorities agreed to provide additional funding for Berkshire LEP in order to continue business as usual in line with 2021/22 activity. This has enabled Berkshire LEP to continue to provide strategic infrastructure and transport support, including supporting the work of the BLTB and BSTF Member and Officer Forums, throughout the current financial year.
6. The local authorities have confirmed that there will be no additional funding through the existing Service Level Agreement in the next financial year. Government Core Grant funding to LEPs has been further reduced for 2023/24 and there is no provision to support the work of the BLTB and BSTF as well as other infrastructure and transport activity.

7. With the LEP no longer fulfilling this role it is necessary to agree what activity should continue pan-Berkshire; identify how this will be delivered; and agree transfer arrangements.

Options Going Forward

8. Berkshire LEP has worked with the Berkshire Place Making Board (PMB), which was established in 2020 and whose membership includes the LEP CEO and lead officers and the Executive Director of Place equivalents in the six local authorities. The LEP produced a paper which summarised the breadth of transport and infrastructure related activity which the Berkshire LEP delivers and coordinates across Berkshire in support of the activities of the individual local authorities.
9. The paper set out the work on transport and infrastructure currently delivered by the LEP and presented options to consider:
 - whether some activities should cease;
 - whether there are alternative options for continued delivery of some activities;
 - whether to take delivery of activity into local authorities and agree transfer arrangements to a lead authority for activities which will be delivered from 1 April 2023 across Berkshire.
 - whether local authorities wish to retain delivery by the LEP for some activities and arrangements to agree costs of such delivery beyond 2022/23.
10. These options were presented to the Berkshire Place Marking Board in January 2023 and the local authority Place Directors requested that the LEP submit a proposal to them outlining the cost for ongoing support in this area from the LEP during 2023/24. Due to the level of cross over, the LEP grouped areas of work together into linked activities, one of which includes ongoing support for the work of the BLTB and BSTF.

Proposed Work Packages

11. Four work packages were developed, the first was explicitly to continue to provide the wrap around support to BLTB governance:

(i) Support for pan-Berkshire Strategic Transport Liaison.

This option provided for the LEP continuing to support and deliver the existing governance structure of the following meetings, with the current frequency:

- Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB)
- Berkshire Strategic Transport Members' Forum (BSTMF)
- Berkshire Strategic Transport Officers' Forum (BSTOF)
- Thames Valley Major Works Co-ordination Group

12. The other three work packages, whilst not specifically related to the operation of the BLTB and other groups, closely support many of the activities of the Board:

(ii) Representation of Berkshire Interests at a Regional/Sub-Regional Level.

This proposed that the LEP could continue its current representation for Berkshire local authorities at groups such as Transport for the South East, and a range of strategic aviation liaison groups, focused on Heathrow Airport. This element of the proposal would also cover

coordinating and leading on responses to consultations such as the recent Call for Evidence on transport infrastructure submitted to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the South East.

(iii) Advocacy and development of strategic transport and infrastructure schemes

This proposed the continuation of the LEP's integral role in advocacy and the development of strategic transport and infrastructure schemes with a range of strategic partners, including Department for Transport and other central Government Departments, Network Rail, Train Operating Companies and National Highways. There is an ongoing need to represent and lobby for investment in Berkshire in major transport infrastructure as well as maintaining the Major Transport Scheme Pipeline, which was approved by BSTF at the last meeting.

(iv) Scheme specific light touch support for Berkshire Local Authorities

Finally, a small retainer package was developed for scheme specific expertise in providing light touch support for Berkshire local authorities. This could take a pan-Berkshire or individual focus, including expert advice on specific transport matters with any significant work requested for an individual authority responded to separately.

13. Excluded from the above is the oversight of the remaining LGF and BBRP funded capital project delivery through to completion. This activity continues to be a requirement funded from core funds from government until all projects are completed by March 2024.

Next Steps & Future BLTB activity

14. The LEP was advised on 24 February that, having considered the above proposal, the Place Directors have decided that delivery of all of the above activities would be picked up by the local authorities from April 2023. The LEP is now starting to work with the six local authorities to effect a transition and handover to the new arrangements as it winds to closure its activity supporting infrastructure and transport for the new financial year.
15. Slough Borough Council will provide the secretariat for the BLTB meetings and is working with the Berkshire local authorities to consider options for BSTF meetings. The detailed arrangements are still being worked up, but broadly it is envisaged that the Heads of Service/Assistant Directors for Transport and Highways will attend/continue to attend to provide the necessary updates and provide the support for both groups. A replacement officer to chair the BSTF Officers group and support the chair of the BLTB is being sought. This could be a Chief Executive or Place Director from one of the six local authorities. This process will be undertaken in consultation with the current chair of the BLTB.