

## **MEETING OF THE BERKSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT BODY (BLTB) – THURSDAY 14 JULY 2022**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Alison Webster, Chief Executive, Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership**

### **Item 7: Evolving Role of Berkshire Local Transport Body**

#### ***Purpose of Report***

1. To outline the way in which the role and function of the Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB) could evolve. A review of BLTB role and purpose is necessary now that the Local Growth Fund (LGF) which had been allocated to LEPs is committed and with the move towards local authorities bidding for infrastructure funding through the new Levelling Up Fund and following the conclusion of the Government's review of LEPs.

#### ***Background and historic role of the Berkshire Local Transport Body***

2. As part of the Levelling Up White Paper that was published in February 2022, the Government outlined their views on the evolving role of LEPs. Key was the recognition of the value of LEPs going forward. It was confirmed that LEPs would continue to play a key role in supporting the levelling up agenda across England. Government values many of the functions LEPs have carried out, especially around strategic planning and convening partners and this provides a solid platform to go forward. Government is encouraging the integration of LEPs and their business boards into Mayoral or the newly defined County Combined Authorities as part of their encouragement towards greater devolution in England through the agreement of County Deals. Government has committed that all areas requesting a county deal arrangement should have one in place by 2030. The Berkshire Leaders' Group committed in December 2021 to consider working towards a Level 2 devolution, with work on evidence and potential asks to include in the deal to be considered later in financial year 2022/23. Therefore, a deal is unlikely to be in place across the six Unitary Authorities in the Berkshire area in the short to medium term so here it will be a case of working within the existing structures.
3. The BLTB was established in 2013 as a voluntary partnership between the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (now known as the Berkshire LEP) and the six local authorities within Berkshire. It was required by the Department for Transport to provide appropriate safeguards for the use of public funds and ensure the delivery of value for money when Government funding for major transport infrastructure schemes which had been devolved to LEPs, through the LGF.
4. The main purpose of BLTB was therefore to prioritise infrastructure schemes to receive the funding allocated by Government. This process is overseen by Slough Borough Council, as the Accountable Body of BLTB, ensuring decisions and activities of BLTB conformed to legal requirements and as well as ensuring appropriate use of funds through the Section 151 Officer, maintaining official records of BLTB proceedings and overall responsibility for BLTB decisions in the case of legal challenge. During its time, the BLTB has approved nearly £173m of capital funds across Berkshire, leveraging in an additional £123m of investment.
5. With the ending of the LGF and its successor the Getting Building Fund, capital funding for infrastructure schemes is no longer channelled through the LEP. Instead, new infrastructure funds, such as the nationally competitive Levelling Up and locally allocated Shared Prosperity Fund are being managed directly by local authorities and the BLTB no longer has a role in making these investment decisions.

### ***An evolving role for the Berkshire Local Transport Body***

6. It is clear that the LEP and BLTB will have less of a role in the provision of capital funding, with the Levelling Up Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund, not being channelled through LEPs but rather local authorities. Once the 'tail' of the LEPs infrastructure funding is spent, BLTB will have no formal funding decisions to make. Nevertheless, the Berkshire LEP and BLTB still provide an invaluable forum for sharing best practice across Berkshire and offering a strong voice and a convening role in making the case for investing in transport infrastructure this is needed to support and grow the Berkshire economy. The Berkshire LEP can also continue to play an important role in bringing together stakeholders from businesses and local authorities to drive economic growth, through groups such as the BLTB and Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum.
7. With the removal of responsibilities for the allocation of funds the BLTB will not need the formal governance and assurance structures that it currently has. However, as well as the convening role outlined above it may be considered as a vehicle to offer governance for any future County Deal, recognising that this may still be some way off.
8. There are still a number of residual issues around schemes in the existing programme, as detailed in Item 6, that suggest value in BLTB meeting again in November. At that point we may also have a clearer picture of the future governance requirements for a Berkshire County Deal and the role the BLTB might be able to play and hence whether there is value in it being retained or whether its convening and advocacy functions can be carried out going forward through the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum, with the formal body being disbanded.

### ***Recommendation***

9. You are recommended to agree that the BLTB reconvene in November. At this meeting a decision will be made as to whether the BLTB needs to continue, or whether it can be merged into the activities of the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum