

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

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

Item 5: Approach to developing aspirations for prioritised strategic transport infrastructure schemes across Berkshire

Purpose of Report

1. To agree the process for developing a prioritised pipeline of strategic transport infrastructure schemes, to demonstrate the ongoing need for transport investments in Berkshire and help maximise the levels of funding secured by our local authorities and their strategic partners.

Background

2. After Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were formed in 2011/12, government asked each LEP to develop and put forward a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) setting out priorities to enable local economic growth. The Berkshire LEP (BLEP) SEP focussed primarily on unlocking growth through investment in transport projects. Based on the BLEP SEP, Local Growth Fund (LGF) was awarded from 2013 in three Growth Deal tranches totalling £142m to enable delivery of the SEP programme. LEP colleagues worked closely with local authority partners through the Berkshire Local Transport Body to develop and deliver the SEP pipeline of major strategic transport schemes. The LGF programme concluded in March 2021 with spend due for completion by March 2023.
3. In 2020 the government provided LEPs with a Getting Building Fund allocation, intended to support local economies to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. BLEP worked with the local authority Place Directors through the Place Making Board (PMB) to invite EOIs for GBF projects which would support the priorities set out in the locally agreed economic Recovery and Renewal Plan (RRP) which had been developed to replace the SEP and built from the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS) which had been locally approved in October 2019. EOIs totalling £220m were received against the TVBLEP GBF allocation of £7.5m. The GBF programme concluded in March 2022 with spend by end March 2024. Two transport projects were funded by the GBF with subsequent approval by BLTB.
4. The LEP has used freedoms and flexibilities delegated by government to the to make capital swaps with local authorities to enable full draw down of funds from government and ensure continued support for transport schemes that were not able to be completed to the LGF or GBF deadlines.
5. A further £36m capital funding was provided by the Berkshire Rates Retention Pilot (BRRP) comprising of £25m of BRRP funds released in 2018/19 with a further £11m in 2019/20. The BBRP capital fund is overseen by BLTB for transport projects along with the LEP Board and Forum and the PMB for other infrastructure investments. The remaining BRRP funding is intended to be spent by end of financial year 2023/24. As this is a local fund, agreement from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is not required to extend spend into financial year 2024/25.
6. Funding for major infrastructure investments is now held nationally by individual Government Departments and local authorities have put forward bids in competition with others through such mechanisms as the Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). UKSPF is primarily a

revenue fund with a minimum of 20% being used as capital, which has been awarded directly to individual local authorities over the period to end of financial year 2024/25. Reflecting the levelling up agenda, each of the six Berkshire local authorities received the minimum allocation of £1m over three years, with most of this funding (over 75% across Berkshire) backloaded to year three.

The Need for a prioritised list of strategic transport schemes in Berkshire

7. Despite investments overseen by BLEP and BLTB over the past decade, there remains a transport infrastructure deficit in Berkshire which should be addressed if the local economy is to reach its maximum potential and we therefore should identify the transport investment needed to maximise its impact and benefit for Berkshire.
8. Beyond 2024/25 and the current Spending Review it is unclear as to where further funding for capital investments in major transport schemes will be held, possibly locally in areas with devolution deals or centrally by the Department for Transport (DfT). Furthermore, the priorities for allocation of transport funding, however disbursed, is unclear. With a General Election due to be held by end January 2025 and a Comprehensive Spending Review scheduled for 2024 to inform Government spending priorities from April 2025 to March 2028, it is vital to have a fully evidenced and agreed list of strategic transport infrastructure schemes that can support both movement and economic growth across Berkshire.
9. This will inform the key campaigning and advocacy role and BLTB, recognising there is a need for a pan-Berkshire view, and that a strategic approach will be more powerful than acting as individual partners. Coming together Berkshire is also much more likely to secure major investment into the area, that will benefit everyone. We will want to develop Berkshire's strategic transport priorities working with partners such as Highways England and Network Rail and with sub-regional transport bodies such as Transport for the South East (TfSE).

Production of a list of prioritised strategic transport schemes in Berkshire

10. The Place Directors have identified a need to confirm strategic transport interventions across Berkshire, particularly where they cross local authority boundaries. The LEP has previously worked with Berkshire local authorities to produce a potential pipeline of local transport schemes. This also formed the basis of our input to the TfSE Strategic Investment Plan, which helps to ensure that the infrastructure needs of Berkshire are fully considered in a wider regional context.
11. The future Berkshire transport infrastructure needs are thus currently contained in two documents:
 - The TfSE Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) - see Appendix 3
 - Spreadsheet of local pipeline transport schemes – see Appendix 4
12. The TfSE SIP contains major infrastructure interventions, such as western and southern rail access to Heathrow, that whilst not necessarily all being physically located in Berkshire, are of significant benefit to the area.
13. This is supplemented by the spreadsheet, which was updated last year, which identifies the name, location, and indicative of each potential scheme, and contains a brief description, together with

identifying its primary objectives and aims. There is also an indication of the likely delivery timescale.

14. Both documents have previously been shared between the authorities and with key external partners such as DfT, TfSE, National Highways and Network Rail to make sure that the lists don't contain anything they are unsupportive of and equally that there are no major interventions missing.
15. What is now proposed is that these two documents are reviewed to make sure that they remain current. Previously we have made no attempt to prioritise the schemes nor considered any issues around deliverability, other than a broad timeline. We may wish to attempt to prioritise schemes with this refresh.
16. It is important to stress that a list of schemes will have no status and inclusion on the list does not imply support or otherwise by any organisation for a particular scheme. They are designed to be an indication of potential schemes in our area that could be brought forward and lobbied for when funding opportunities are identified.
17. However, with a General Election on the horizon and the Comprehensive Spending Review scheduled to take place next year, experience suggests that Government typically want "shovel ready" schemes in response to funding opportunities. It is therefore proposed that we should now look to agree some form of prioritisation, so that BLTB members can collectively work together to promote and secure funding for a handful of those key transport infrastructure schemes.
18. It is suggested that this is done through a series of workshops and engagement events feeding back to the BLTB in March 2024, so the priorities can be agreed by members across Berkshire. It is also proposed that members and partners have an initial discussion around this at the BSTF meeting that immediately succeeds the BLTB, to help inform the consensus building exercise, around the top Berkshire-wide priorities.

Recommendation

19. To agree to the establishment of the appropriate officer and partner structures and workshops to develop a list of prioritised strategic transport across Berkshire.