

Economy & Transport Programme Board – report from Cllr Peter Box

Local Enterprise Partnerships

1. Baroness Margaret Eaton OBE and David Frost, Director General, British Chambers of Commerce have written a joint letter to councils and chambers making the case for proposals on local enterprise partnerships – which are due in to BIS/CLG by 6 September – that challenge Ministers to devolve decision-making, demonstrate a strong ambition for dynamic, enterprising local economies and are based on functional economic areas rather than administrative boundaries.

LG Rural Commission

2. I gave a presentation on behalf of the Economy and Transport Programme Board at the LGA Rural Commission, which was held on 7 September 2010 in Chester. The presentation focused on issues of public transport in rural areas.

Planning and Funding for Infrastructure

3. The Board will publish its proposals for a different approach to planning and funding for infrastructure in early September 2010. The proposals will make the case for investment in a range of physical infrastructure needs and argue that localising decision making and giving councils more flexibility to raise investment locally are crucial to meeting the countries infrastructure needs.

Reform of bus subsidy system

4. Members of the Economy and Transport Board met with Secretary of State for Transport, Phillip Hammond and Transport Minister, Norman Baker on 1st July to discuss future reform of the bus subsidy system. Cllr Harker presented the LGA's proposals for bringing together existing funding streams into a single pot under the control of local authorities. Ministers agreed that there is a need to consider options for reform which could facilitate a greater degree of control over spending while providing greater leverage over the outcomes that subsidy buys in terms of services and control over fares. Ministers also agreed that the LGA and DfT officers should work together to develop options for reform. Following the meeting, Cllr Harker wrote to Philip Hammond and LGA officers are pursuing a programme of work running in parallel with the spending review process to develop options for reform.

Bus Partnership Forum

5. Members of the Board attended the Bus Partnership Forum with Norman Baker MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, on 12th July to discuss bus policy and priorities for the coalition government. Discussion included reform of bus service operators grant (BSOG), concessionary fares,

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and punctuality and rollout of smartcards. Members again presented the LGA's proposals for bus subsidy reform, which would allow all of these issues to be dealt with in a more coherent and joined up way with greater local impact. It was agreed at the meeting that the officer working group bringing together local authorities and operators should be convened to explore options for reform of bus subsidy to report back to the Forum.

6. The Minister said he would be considering options for radical reform of reimbursement for Concessionary Travel, but that major reform in 2011/12 is unlikely given that Councils will need to agree schemes by the beginning of December 2010. Ministers intend to consult on revised guidance for reimbursement over the summer with a view to improving processes within the current system. Local government representatives stressed the importance of ensuring that no councils was left out of pocket as a result of the transfer of responsibility for administration of concessionary fares in two tier areas and asked that options for the transfer of funding be consulted on as a matter of urgency.

Board Meeting 22 July 2010

7. Cllr Shona Johnstone hosted the Board meeting at Shire Hall, Cambridgeshire County Council on 22 July which was followed by a local tour which included the new guided busway, the site of a new railway station and Cambridge Station where a new transport interchange is being built.

Contact officer: Fatima de Abreu

Position: Member Support Officer

Phone no: 020 7664 3136

E-mail: Fatima.deabreu@local.gov.uk