

## Notes and Decisions from Previous Meeting

### Regeneration and Transport Board

22 January 2009, Local Government House, Smith Square, London

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#### Present:-

<b>Chairman:</b>	Cllr David Sparks (Labour) (Dudley MDC)
<b>Deputy Chair(s):</b>	Cllr Richard Knowles (Lib Dem) (Greater Manchester PTA and Oldham MDC) Prof John Whitelegg (Lancaster City)
<b>Vice Chair:</b>	Cllr Jim Harker (Cons) (Northamptonshire CC)
<b>Conservative:</b>	Cllr Shona Johnstone (Cambridgeshire CC) Cllr Andrew Carter (Leeds City Council) Cllr Peter Jackson (Castle Morpeth DC) Cllr Ricky Bower (Arun DC)
<b>Labour:</b>	Cllr Tony Page (Reading Council)
<b>Liberal Democrat:</b>	Cllr Heather Kidd (South Shropshire DC) Cllr Sylvia Dunkley (South Yorkshire PTA and Sheffield CC)
<b>Substitutes:</b>	Lesley Clarke (Wycombe DC)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Cllr Stephen Parnaby (East Riding of Yorkshire) Cllr Roy Davis (Luton) Cllr Mark Dowd (Merseyside Travel and Sefton Council)
<b>LGA Officers:</b>	Paul Raynes, Caroline Green, Ian Keating, Steven Skelton, Nick Porter, Fatima de Abreu

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and notified them that there would be no presentations due to the intensity of the Agenda.

Further to the point being raised by the Board, Cllr Sparks asked members to inform him at the beginning of meetings if they ever felt a conflict of interest with any of the items on the Agenda.

#### Item 1 - Council's Response to the Recession

Paul Raynes highlighted this as a significant priority for the LGA and notified members that the Regeneration and Transport Board had been recognised as a key player in building a response. Members **noted** the Annex which detailed the recession work Project Plan.

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Recent LGA research had indicated that the recession is likely to impact differently in different areas, therefore all intelligence shared by members would be of benefit in informing the LGA programme.

Members then held a discussion raising several issues including:

- The project plan must include ongoing work already being done by local authorities, and not just work planned in response to the government agenda;
- Current focus is upon LAs helping local communities and businesses – it is also vital to look at the impact of the recession on LAs themselves as this will be fundamental to working out how much they *can* help;
- Local authorities are losing resources – jobs are being cut and there is a fear that central government funding is going to get worse. There needs to be investment in a local infrastructure and information needs to be gathered circulated as to how LAs can make an immediate impact;
- Borrowing is a problem but in order to retain people and skills, the importance of infrastructure capital investment needs to be a key message;
- Although there is now a greater pressure due to rising levels of homelessness, housing authorities are having difficulties in borrowing due to a slowness of release of Government funds and the credit crunch. Affordable housing could be built, but Section 106 revenue for infrastructure is less available.
- There is a greater pressure on LA services such as schools – children are being taken out of the private system;
- Benefit claimants have to wait a month before receiving help – this in turn leads to lack of spending and, again, impacts on businesses.
- The media strategy needs to show that redirection of public money to LAs - such as that of investment in reducing the carbon footprint - would create jobs in many sectors.

The LGA is lobbying for changes in Government systems to allow LAs to respond quickly to the recession, such as in the areas of housing, transport innovation and helping small businesses. It was felt that the LGA needs to stress to government what it can do to help LAs deliver these activities. It would be vital to portray positive messages and media stories *must* include positive solutions. It was felt that pooling resources of the RDAs and LAs would help businesses and regeneration.

## **Decisions:**

- Members noted the report and project plan
- Members requested that the LGA take forward suggestions

## **Actions:**

*Next meeting:*

- Stephen Jones (Director of Finance and Performance, LGA) to attend with an update on finance issues
- Circulate updated project plan
- Readdress recession storyline

**Paul Raynes / Steven Skelton**

## **Item 2 - The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill**

Ian Keating informed members that the Bill is currently being considered in Lords. The LGA has concerns about RDA delegation of funds to councils. Although ministers have argued that legislation is not needed –members suggested that the Bill should be amended to include a provision requiring RDAs to delegate funding.

Paul Raynes suggested that, as clauses within the Bill would not be scrutinised, a serious debate would be beneficial.

### **Decisions:**

- Members noted the report

## **Item 3 - Concessionary Fares, Local Transport Act and Update**

A meeting had taken place with all the LAs who had lost out under the special grants scheme. The LGA is committed to supporting lobbying for those that have not received a fair proportion in accordance to their requirements.

There were several concerns raised by the Board including:

- A lack of response from some of the LAs approached proved that some were gaining from the scheme;
- Concerns that the letter written by the Chair had not reached the appropriate person and therefore some responses would be missing;
- A few members had not been aware of the meeting set up to discuss council's shortfalls;
- The cost of inflation to bus costs must be taken into account by the Department for Transport;
- Smartcard readers had been shown to work and should be introduced more widely, although providing technology and capacitating buses with readers would need to be imposed – the Government should address this as small operators would be unable to fund it on their own despite its benefits.

Caroline Green informed members that true evidence of the cost of the scheme would not be available until later this year and that, until then, figures would be inaccurate. The list of those LAs with shortfalls was not exhaustive and information provided was often conflicting.

Members then discussed the interrelation of air and high speed rail travel. The need for internal flights via Heathrow should be assessed before decisions are made upon creating further runways. It was felt that Network Rail should be more involved, particularly in respect of high-speed rail, and members suggested that a high-profile representative should be invited along to speak at the next meeting.

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## **Decisions:**

- Members suggested that a list be compiled of all Local Authorities and their income/spend on Concessionary fares.

## **Actions:**

- To circulate details of LAs invited - and those who attended - the meeting on 16/1
  - To include an Agenda item on Air travel at the next Board meeting with clear documentation on travel aviation focussing on Heathrow in particular;
  - Consider setting up a joint meeting with the Environment Board to discuss topical transport issues;
- Caroline Green / Steven Skelton**

## **Item 4 - LGA Group Business Planning – proposed work programme on the economy theme**

The LGA Executive had approved the workplan for collaborative working between local government organisations with the key aim to develop a single business planning process. Ten percent of costs would need to be saved from the Regeneration & Transport programme. Members were assured that subscription costs would be kept down.

Some members expressed their dissatisfaction with the decision over cost savings. Sara Williams (LGA Strategic Adviser, Corporate Communities and Partnerships) assured members that the IDEA placed great importance on making this system work for all and that sharing practices between councils and across the central bodies would lead to greater benefits.

The Chair informed everyone that the Resource Panel had conferred with LGA Group Leaders in making these decisions and that the overriding reason for this is due to the current economic situation. Members agreed that the LGA needed to be more concise and forceful in relating its delivery of work. It was agreed that priorities would need to be set for efficiency savings.

## **Decisions:**

- The Board noted the report

## **Action:**

- LGA Board Chairs to recommend priorities to Executive Board  
**Office Holders / Cllr David Sparks**

## **Item 5 - Draft LGA Key Messages on the EU Territorial Cohesion Green Paper**

This paper, submitted by Nick Porter (Policy and Public Affairs Officer, European and International Unit), updated members on the development of draft LGA key messages on the Green Paper. One of the things that had come out of the consultation with stakeholder organisations had been a recognition of the importance

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of the Regeneration and Transport Board as the “anchor” board for Territorial Cohesion within the LGA . The Chair thanked Nick for his update

Points raised in relation to this were that:

- There was a tension between ringfenced rural funding and funding for the rural / urban fringe communities;
- The issue of distribution of cohesion funds needs to be properly addressed – assurance must be given that rural development would receive a fair share.

**Decisions:**

- Members noted the report

**Item 6 – Oral Feedback**

Councillor Lesley Clarke notified the Board that she had recently attended a workshop held by the Driving Standards Agency,(DSA) the focus of which was to look at partnership working to achieve better driver safety outcomes. The DSA had expressed interest in presenting to the Board at some stage and officers were in contact with them.

Councillor Ricky Bower had recently attended the Motorists Forum anniversary dinner, also attended by the Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Geoff Hoon MP. Department for Transport (DfT) officials had expressed an interest in giving their presentation to the Regeneration and Transport Board.

The Chair thanked both for their contribution, and noted that Lead Members to the board were the appropriate group to consider requests to present to the Board.

**Decisions:**

- The Board noted the updates
- Members were advised to submit all requests to present at Board meetings to Officer Holders

**Action:**

- To discuss the possibility of inviting DfT to present at the next meeting.

**Office Holders**

**Item 7 – Financial Inclusion**

Members noted the report.

**Item 8 – Outside Bodies Membership 2008/09**

Members noted the finalised list of membership.

**Item 9 – Note from the Previous Meeting**

The Board agreed the minutes from the previous meeting, 19 November 2008.

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The Chair, prior to closing the meeting, informed members that further to consideration, it had been decided that the date for the May meeting should remain unchanged, i.e. **Wednesday, 20 May 2009**.