

21 January 2010

Note of the last Meeting and Decisions Taken

(18 November 2009)

Present:

Chairman	Cllr David Sparks (Dudley MDC)
Vice-Chair	Cllr Jim Harker (Northamptonshire CC)
Deputy Chairs	Cllr Richard Knowles (Greater Manchester ITA / Oldham MBC); Prof John Whitelegg (Lancaster City)
Conservative	Cllr Shona Johnstone (Cambridgeshire CC); Cllr Ricky Bower (Arun DC); Cllr Kevin Lynes (Kent CC)
Labour	Cllr Mark Dowd (Merseyside Travel / Sefton Council); Cllr Roy Davis (Luton BC)
Liberal Democrat	Cllr Heather Kidd (Shropshire Council); Cllr Zulfiqar Ali (Rochdale MBC)
Apologies	Cllr Andrew Carter (Leeds City); Cllr Peter Jackson (Northumberland Council); Cllr Mahroof Hussain (Rotherham MBC)
Substitutes In attendance	LGA Officers: Paul Raynes; Philip Mind; Caroline Green; Cassandra Harrison; Steve Skelton; Fatima de Abreu

1. Making the case for Transport Spending

At its previous meeting, members had agreed to undertake a work programme aimed at protecting investment currently earmarked for transport. They had also requested work to explore alternative means of financing transport infrastructure investment.

Caroline Green set out a proposal for the key elements of the work programme and asked members for their comments and suggestions of examples of case studies in order to inform the work proposed. Members were informed that a letter outlining councils' concerns about transport spending plans, highlighting the case for investment and its positive effects on the economy, had since been sent to Lord Adonis (Secretary of State, DfT). A reply had not yet been received. Officers agreed to pursue a response.

Members agreed that the report was very clear in outlining the challenges local authorities face with regard to transport spending, and raised the following concerns:

- The need for clarity on future funding for highway maintenance;
- The report seemed to focus mainly on urban areas – work should highlight the impact on all major road networks and connections and a balance between rural

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and urban areas must be met;

- The impact of government decisions and changes – such as post-office closures - upon traffic in surrounding areas should be addressed;
- The government must be continually reminded that investment in transport will keep local economies working. Lobbying should include examples of positive outcomes achievable from investment and regeneration, such as helping the construction industry and creation of jobs;
- City region competitiveness must be considered – compared to its European counterparts, Britain continues to come bottom of the list for per capita investment in public transport. Members agreed that strong evidence of this fact should be used in taking forward lobbying issues;
- Economics surrounding air quality targets need to be addressed, particularly with regard to the lack of funding available to local authorities to meet these targets;
- Issues around the impact of freight travel in rural lanes were raised, including flooding and viability;
- Investment appraisal was important and created barriers to sensible projects, for example, by using an unrealistic oil price or failing to account for air quality and health issues.

Members referred to various incentives within their local and neighbouring areas as examples of good practice and agreed to send these to Caroline Green in order to inform the work-plan. They felt that pressure should be applied to encourage government support for raising income locally for transport investment rather than just focusing upon cuts. The Board agreed that this work should be set as far as possible in the context of Total Place.

Decision

- The Board noted the reports and **agreed** that LGA officers should continue with the work programme proposed.

Action

- Members to send published reports and/or case studies to Caroline Green. **All**
- Officers to pursue response from Lord Adonis and and report progress at future meetings. **Caroline Green**

2. Concessionary Fares

Caroline Green began by informing the Board about an announced consultation from DfT on a revised distribution of the £223 million Special Grant Funding for 2010/11. The consultation process would last 8 weeks with a decision on whether to re-open the grant expected in January. She encouraged them to respond in order to endorse the need to stress the point that adequate funding needs to be available:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/specialgrantfunding/>

Caroline referred to previous discussions and told members that, in response to the announcement, the following actions have been / will be taken:

- Cllr Eaton (Chairman, LGA) had written to all leaders encouraging them to respond to the consultation;

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- An LGA press release outlining the LGA's position has been issued;
- LGA Officers and Lead Members are liaising closely with London Councils on the implications of the proposed reduction of the grant in London;
- A meeting will be held at LGH for all officers from travel concession authorities to discuss and inform the LGA of the impact of revised funding;
- The LGA will continue to make representation to Ministers endorsing the need for sufficient funding.

Members were concerned that the decision would be made too late for local authorities to feed into their budgets. They agreed that it would be important to retain direct grant funding for 2011 and onwards and emphasised the need for transparency. They discussed requesting a significant contingency to allow for shortfalls although it was felt that this was unlikely as it had been previously refused. Cllr Sparks agreed that this concern should continue to be on the agenda but that it should be led by officers. The Board had received a letter together with the report, which the Chairman had written to Sadiq Khan MP raising the issue of cross border concessionary travel between England, Scotland and Wales, and had also spoken with him. No response had been given to date, members were assured that officers were pressurising his office for a response.

Decision

- The Board noted the report.

Action

- Officers to progress actions as agreed. **All**
- Officers to pursue response from Sadiq Khan MP and report progress at future meetings. **Caroline Green**

3. Adult Skills

Paul Raynes updated the Board on adult skills decision making and funding, and informed members that since the issue was discussed at the last meeting:

- The government has unveiled a skills strategy which gives Regional Development Agencies leadership on making strategic decisions about adult skills but within the scope for joint consideration with regional boards of local government leaders;
- A meeting between Cllr Margaret Eaton, chairs of regional joint leaders' boards, Kevin Brennan and Rosie Winterton will take place on 1 December to clarify government's intentions.

Members asked for better clarification of the Joint Leaders' Board role and the Chairman said that it had a very important part in addressing local authority issues with regard to development of adult skills. He assured them that the Board's purpose was to ensure that flexibility is retained in decision-making and not dominated by an unresponsive central bureaucracy.

Members raised concerns that the skills system is even less responsive to the needs of rural economies because people typically have further to travel for training and for support by Job Centre Plus.

Decision

- The Board noted the report and **agreed** that LGA officers should continue with the work programme proposed.

Action

- Report the Board's views in the brief for Cllr Eaton's meeting with government ministers and feedback the outcome of this meeting to members. **Philip Mind**

4. Transport and Air Quality

Cassandra Harrison updated the Board on implications for local authorities arising from the failure to meet EU objectives for pollution, and in particular surrounding air quality and local transport planning. Although the focus is currently on climate change, she told members that Defra are currently holding a review of local air quality management and that this could have significant implications for local authorities' power and resources.

Cassandra reminded them that a meeting had been arranged for them to meet with Defra and DfT consultants in order to provide political input, together with members of the Environment Board. The meeting will take place on **4th December at 2pm at LGH** and she encouraged members to attend if they could.

Members agreed that air quality issues were a problem and raised concerns about effects on human health. They recognised that local authorities have powers to make changes but that it was difficult particularly in monitoring shared roads and determining area responsibilities. Cassandra pointed out that LAs should be encouraged to link at local levels to share information and evidence. Members informed her of examples used in their own authorities of achieving low emission ratings and she asked them to forward these to her.

Cassandra.harrison@lacors.gov.uk

The Board were concerned that information from Defra was inaccurate and Cassandra agreed to raise this with them at the meeting in December. Members requested information about the Air Quality Summit which is being held on 30th November.

Decision

- The Board noted the report.

Action

- Continue with the work programme and report on updates.

Cassandra Harrison

- Consider attending meeting on **4th December** to provide political input on transport and air quality

All

5. Regional Planning / RDAs

Members noted the report which outlined the LGA's response to the CLG's consultation on regional strategies and leaders' boards. Philip Mind reminded them that LGA messages had highlighted the importance of combining national and local priorities in development of regional strategies and that priorities had to be based of assessment of all needs and include bottom-up objectives. Members referred to the comments they had made in Item 3 and agreed that the leaders' boards should reflect membership from different areas – Philip notified them that National Parks Leaders would be included.

Decision

- The Board noted the report.

Action

- Continue to lobby for integrated national and local priorities to be part of regional strategies.

Officers

6. EU Update – Recession Report, EU Funds and Transport

Members received an update on the LGA's work on EU funds for regeneration and jobs. Nick Porter (EIU) informed them that the European Unit has developed a report examining how councils around the world are dealing with the recession. The report was to be officially launched at an evening event in LGH on **9 December 2009**.

Nick also updated on the results of the LGA survey of councils on future of EU funds, the results of which are already attracting interest from policy-makers in Brussels.

Decision

- The Board noted the report

7. Oral Feedback from Members

Members were invited to feedback on meetings attended on Outside Bodies.

- Cllr Bower had recently attended a meeting of Transport Futures where they had discussed the business plan for next year. He agreed to send a note of the meeting to the office for circulation once it had been received;
- Cllr Johnstone referred to the CTS Board and her representation as a member of the Regeneration & Transport Board on 2012 discussions. She raised concerns that meetings had come to a halt and requested information about future plans. Paul Raynes confirmed that CTS Board members had recently agreed to arrange further joint meetings to discuss 2012 and would notify her of possible dates in due course.

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Cllr Knowles raised concern that, as a representative of the Board, he had not been notified of meeting dates for the Transport Futures meetings. The Chairman agreed that officers would raise this with their secretariat, and that if, on occasion, members were unable to attend outside body meetings they were assigned to, consideration of nominating a substitute should be given.

Decision

- The Board noted feedback from members.

Action

- Inform Cllr Johnstone of meeting dates to discuss 2012 **Officers**
- Email organisations to check whether substitutes can replace nominated members to Outside Bodies if they are unable to attend meetings and subsequently request volunteers from the Board **Fatima de Abreu**

8. Note of the last Meeting and Decisions Taken

Members agreed the note of the last meeting subject to the following actions:

- Nick Bisson had said that he was willing to speak to the Welsh Assembly on the issue of cross-border concessionary bus travel and members asked that DfT be reminded of this;
- Members had not yet received the DfT newsletter despite officers having sent through email addresses. Officers were asked to investigate.

Action

- Take forward members' requests as above.

Caroline Green