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| **LG_Association_Black** | **Councillors’ Forum** |
| 20 March 2014 |
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Economy and Transport Board – report from Cllr Peter Box CBE (Chair)

1. Many of us have been signing off our growth plans in the past few weeks and attending challenge meetings with Lords Heseltine and Shipley. I hope that councillors are taking the opportunity to remind Whitehall that whilst our plans are joined up locally and founded on local partnerships, we still have major concerns about government departments’ ability to join up their own budgets outside the usual Whitehall silos. At last year’s conference, Lord Heseltine asked us to take up this cause. I hope you are doing so.

**Parking Summit**

1. I represented the LGA at the British Parking Association parking summit on 27 February. Hosted by London Councils, the summit aimed to bring some reason to the debate around the government's proposals to ban the use of CCTV enforcement of on-street parking regulations. I reiterated the point made in our response to the recent government consultation on parking that it is essentially a local issue and that faced with a predicted increase in traffic on local roads of 42 percent by 2040 and a £10.5 billion backlog in road maintenance, the apparent determination of some ministers to micromanage parking makes no sense. I was encouraged to hear the minister say that this is a genuine consultation and the government has yet to make up its mind, and that he believes that 'the majority of local authorities and parking providers are doing excellent work'. Unfortunately some of his colleagues seem less willing to listen.

**Regional Growth Fund**

1. The Economy and Transport Board has long expressed strong concerns that allocating funding for local growth and regeneration through competitive processes run by Whitehall departments does not deliver value for money and impedes swift action on the ground. Our concerns were borne out by a report from the National Audit Office (NAO) on the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) that was published last month, indicating that the bulk of funds remain unspent. This report is an update to the NAO’s first look at the RGF in November 2012, which raised strong concerns about how the fund was being managed by Government departments and the length of time it was taking for money to reach projects on the ground. The update report concludes that although the Fund’s governance has improved and the process of making funding offers to bidders has sped up, it will nevertheless be a challenge to spend the £1.4 billion that remains in the fund. The Board will soon be publishing further analysis of the impacts of administering funding for local growth and regeneration through what Lord Heseltine described as "departmental penny packets".

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**Local Enterprise Partnerships - 'Making your LEP work'**

1. 'Making your LEP work' was the title of a learning event for councillors that Deputy Chair of the Board, Cllr Mike Haines, chaired in Taunton on 4 March. I was pleased to hear that a number of leaders and cabinet members participated in the event, including Board member, Cllr Tudor Evans, Leader of Plymouth, who presented to the group. The event provided a valuable forum for councillors to share and learn more about LEPs around the country, and provided space for discussion and learning on governance and challenges to be overcome.

**Transport Select Committee on local decision-making**

1. I was delighted that Deputy Chair of the Board, Cllr Heather Kidd (Shropshire Council), was able to attend the Transport Select Committee on local decision-making on 10 March to provide oral evidence as part of a panel of witnesses. Cllr Kidd highlighted councils' concerns around the current arrangement for local decision-making: whilst councils welcomed the government's efforts to devolve to a more local level, these are too tentative and confusing in nature. The constant chopping and changing of models, such as from LTBs to LEPs, has added to confusion. The significant competitive element of the Local Growth Fund has led to greater uncertainty, lead to waste, and in fact takes decisions further away from localities, who are best placed to provide value-for-money for the tax-payer.

**Concessionary bus services**

1. I have called on the Government to use this month's Budget to fully fund the concessionary fare scheme for elderly and vulnerable people, to ease the pressure on stretched council budgets and protect bus services. The concessionary fares scheme provides a lifeline for our most vulnerable residents to go shopping, pick up medication, attend doctor appointments or socialise with friends. The way the concessionary travel scheme is funded by Whitehall has long been unfit for purpose and has not kept up with growing demand and cost. Unless the Government commits to fully funding concessionary fares, elderly and disabled people will be left stranded with a free bus pass in one hand but no local buses to travel on in the other. Statements by myself as well as Cllr Peter Fleming and Cllr David Simmonds were picked up across national radio and broadcasters, including during the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson's, phone in on LBC.

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