

Economy and Transport Board: Review of the year

Introduction

1. This report sets out some of the big headline issues that the Board has addressed this year. Right at the beginning of the year, we agreed a focused programme in 2013-14 highlighting the needs for the reform of national programmes dealing with local growth, transport and skills.
2. At last year's annual conference, Lord Heseltine passed the baton to the LGA to hold the Government to account and maintain the pressure for economic devolution. This is exactly what we have done.
3. **£2b for local economic development, but councils' ambition is much greater**
Supporting councils in the drive for economic growth and new jobs has been the priority of the Board. Building on the great successes of the City Deals, we led the lobby calling for the Government and Opposition to extend this policy to all councils who had such ambition. The development of a second phase of city deals and growth deals for all Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) areas was a good step forward. Equally, we worked with the Labour Party's Adonis Review which is promising greater devolution for local partners.
4. Whitehall's £2 billion Local Growth fund is a small first step towards meeting our ambition.
5. However, many of us have recently signed off our new strategic economic plans and our ambition goes far beyond the policy and budgetary boundaries established by Whitehall. All political groups on the Board were clear that we must ensure that Whitehall's lack of vision was challenged, just as Lord Heseltine has asked us to do.
6. In July, we published independent research to show that funding for local growth is still allocated through over 120 separate funding streams across 20 departments and national agencies.
7. The drive for economic devolution is not a sprint. The Board's lobbying gains have to be matched by constant challenge to ensure that the ambition of councils is not thwarted by Whitehall's apathy.

Victory against micro management in transport, with utilities brought to account

8. Board members have spent much time this year turning up at TV studios at dawn advocating the public good of councils parking policies. These policies save lives outside schools.
9. From the poorly-evidenced threat by the Department Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to ban CCTV cameras, we brought together an alliance of business and charities which ensured a Government u-turn. All the exemptions to a CCTV ban which were proposed by the LGA (outside schools and on red routes, for example) were endorsed by the Department for Transport (DFT) and DCLG.

10. Motorists pay more than £1000 per annum in taxes to the Treasury to use a transport system that is crumbling from underfunding. With a predicted increase of 42 per cent traffic on local roads by 2014 and a £12 billion backlog in roads maintenance, we should not expect ministers to be focused on the micro-management of local parking. Instead they should take a lead from local government. The Board delivered a new deal with national utilities companies to drive improvement to street-works and reducing the £70 million cost to councils to poor road repairs.
11. Staying on the issue of crumbling roads there was good news for councils on the back of a call for support from the LGA for emergency Government funding for our roads and communities following severe damage caused by the recent wet winter and flooding. A total of £183.5 million was made available to councils to repair damaged roads.
12. Following years of frustration with the Highways Agency (HA) the Board have been instrumental in achieving a breakthrough in relations between councils and business leaders on HA support for local growth. The Chief Executive of the HA has been invited to the next meeting of the Board to share how the Agency intends to support Strategic Economic Plans. We also look forward to his views on how local engagement is going to be wired into the workings of the new strategic company that will replace it.
13. The Secretary of State for Transport attended one of our Board meetings last year and we challenged him to move from the sparring between ourselves on TV and to consider a new costed plan to address the pot-hole crisis. He agreed. We will present this at our annual conference. I hope he endorses it.

More to do to help residents into jobs

14. Councils have been very frustrated by the lack of understanding in Whitehall that the national skills programmes are not delivering. The feedback from councils is that we have to keep the pressure on Whitehall for reform. As we head towards a general election, this must be a priority for all parties.
15. Throughout the year, Board members have presented evidence of Select Committees, Opposition leaders and civil servants. For example, our Hidden Talents work showed that 40 per cent of all young people were either unemployed or under-employed. Without significant public service reform, 1 in 3 young people will remain in that situation by 2018.

Moving forward

16. Following the LGA governance review, the Board will have its final meeting in July. It will reappear in the autumn as part of the merged new Board for Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Board members past and present for all their work and I would like to particular thank Cllr Tony Ball, the former leader of Basildon, who was Vice Chair of the Board until 22 May who made an excellent and lasting contribution to this national debate.

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