

Note of last Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board meeting

Title: Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board
Date: Tuesday 7 July 2020
Venue: Zoom

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies were received from Cllr Darren Rodwell. Cllr Chris Hammond acted as Lead Member for the Labour Group during the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Nick Rushton. Cllr Catherine Rankin attended as a substitute for Cllr Rushton.

Apologies were received from Cllr Rachel Blake. Cllr Tom Haye attended as a substitute for Cllr Blake.

Apologies were received from Cllr Phillip Glanville. Cllr Peter Mason attended as a substitute for Cllr Glanville.

Cllrs Tim Hodgson and Diana Moore attended the meeting as observers.

2 Rail Delivery Group Presentation

Andy Bagnall, Chief Strategy Officer from Rail Delivery Group (RDG), trade body for the rail industry, gave a presentation to the Board on RDG's response to the pandemic and approach to the future of rail.

RDG performs functions essential to the running of rail including ticketing (redistributing ticket sales to operators), reservations, and providing timetabling information to passengers, as well as policy development, lobbying and advocacy. It counts both private sector train operators and Network Rail as members.

During the pandemic, RDG worked to keep the rail operating and passengers safe. Andy praised the Emergency Measures Agreements (EMAs) put in place by Government (but due to expire on 20 September), which protected the rail industry, ensured key workers could travel to work

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and freight lines could continue operating, thereby keeping goods on supermarket shelves. The challenge for RDG now is to restore the railway and support Government to get right the balance between economic and health outcomes.

Andy detailed the long-term, radical reforms to rail that RDG would like to see emerge from the crisis which included;

- Full scale fare reform (current pricing fails to reflect the way people travel. Peak and Off-Peak tickets create an artificial cliff edge, a smoother approach to pricing would smooth demand and provide a better customer experience. RDG estimate this could grow journeys by £300 million over 5 years – and provide environmental benefits.
- Full roll out of pay as you go and tap in, tap out allowing for multi-model fare options as seen across the TfL network in London.
- Abolishing the franchising system (replacing the franchise system with, in commuter urban areas, concession contracts (e.g. London Overground) which makes the best use of limited capacity and lines up the railway timetable more effectively with other modes of transport. However, where there is room for growth, less specified contracts – ‘outcome-based contracts’ - will drive growth and revenue.
- A new National Rail Body - Government should set the strategy and levels of public spending and a new, arm’s length National Rail Body would be best placed to run day to day operations and keep operators and infrastructure compatible and accountable. This approach could accelerate devolution as with a more coherent overarching framework it would be possible to devolve contracting (such as city regions) and allow greater local input into the specifications of contracts, as well as clearer accountability.

These measures would entice passengers back to the railway.

RDG believes that these reforms would see a railway that emerges from the current crisis stronger and more accountable to the customer whilst also serving the environmental agenda and is looking for a coalition of support from the LGA and local government.

RDG is supportive of HS2 (the first new mainline in a century), which Andy insists is an investment in the existing network, an important alternative to domestic air travel which will also free up a huge amount of capacity on the railway.

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

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- That any reforms should improve connectivity to and within the regions
- Members welcomed the report, and particularly appreciated the 8-point plan, especially bringing decision making ‘closer to home’
- Swipe/tap in/out technology roll out across the network is highly desirable
- Members questioned how to make Network Rail perform better and be more reactive to the requirements of the network.
- That any new National Rail Body must also be accountable communities through councils.
- That Network Rail (as the infrastructure provider) by definition is slower moving and less innovative than the operators (who are more responsive to passengers).
- That longer contracts are desired as they create a longer period for an investment profile, however it was recognised that this would likely be front loaded
- Concerns were raised that Government may use the crisis to centralise and views were expressed that Network Rail must not be put in charge
- That there could be scope for competition in rail for long distance journeys

Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the presentation.

3 Climate Change: Decarbonising the Grid

Jo Wall, Local Partnership’s Strategic Director for Climate Response, gave a presentation to the Board on the current state of the energy grid, what steps might be taken during the next 30 years to achieve the UK’s carbon neutral ambitions and what challenges local government faces in this pursuit.

Jo explained that;

- Public opinion concerning renewables is very high, enjoying 84 percent public support (slightly less for onshore wind 78 percent). However, many local communities are averse to on shore wind.

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- The transition of heat and transport on to the electricity network plus population growth, has resulted in a rise in demand for electricity of 50%.
- In order to achieve net zero carbon ambitions less energy must be consumed, everything must be able to run from electricity, and we must address the 40% of energy that still comes from fossil fuels.
- now. Carbon capture and storage is in its infancy and not viable. This has not yet been delivered at scale commercially, and methane leakage is a concern.
- Storage solutions must be found – hydrogen and other emerging technologies (compressed air storage) could help with this issue.
- Wind turbines currently produce more power for the grid than there is demand for, therefore they are often seen standing idle. Wind Turbines are easy to switch off (nuclear power is not easy to switch off).
- Nuclear power is currently required and there is still a projected shortfall meaning it may continue to be needed in future. However, the UK has an aging fleet of nuclear reactors and the cycle for a new reactor from conception to operation is at least 25 years.
- The challenge with brownfield sites is they are often allocated for other planning uses which are more valuable, solar/wind cannot compete with housing values.
- Decarbonising the grid will be achieved by delivering change at a scale of pace, but largely within the framework we recognise now.

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

- Members expressed frustration that in the current system local authorities are unable to invest ahead of need and therefore cannot make the grid fit for the future without a change in legislation.
- Views were expressed that Government should provide incentives and the money required to assist councils with community energy projects and keep current hubs operating
- Views were expressed that a balanced and honest debate should take place about Nuclear energy which will continue to be needed in future. It was felt that there is too much focus on wind and solar without letting public know that nuclear is needed too
- Concerns were raised that relaxing planning regulations too much would result in wind farms in inappropriate areas

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- That barriers should be removed, and success stories shared – local government have access to information on what will make the best and biggest difference and then encouraged and incentivised to make these changes occur at pace
- That local communities benefit from being actively educated about decarbonising the grid and what benefits it will produce for the individual, community and environment
- Views were expressed that a more strategic approach should be taken by councils e.g. allocation of sites in local plans and the earmarking of most appropriate locations

Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board agreed to note the presentation.

Action

Officers will consider what key messages the EEHT Board want to take forward.

4 Planning with Simon Gallagher (confidential)

Simon Gallagher, Director of Planning at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, addressed the EEHT Board.

Simon gave thanks to local councils as local planning authorities for how they have responded throughout the pandemic to keep the planning system moving, praising councils for being innovative and finding new ways of working, noting the importance of capturing this learning.

Simon discussed the Business and Planning Bill and explained that it was designed to provide support to the economy and construction sector. The Bill would deal with the issue of expiring planning permissions and settle the issue of digitalisation through changes to the current legislation. However, he explained that the matter of five-year land supply has not yet been settled.

Simon acknowledged the Prime Minister's recent speech on planning reform and the new permitted development rights explaining that these had been designed to provide short run support to the economy through 'building upwards', enabling demolition and the rebuilding of redundant office and commercial buildings and increasing flexibility within the use classes order.

Simon encouraged Members of the Board to be guided by the Building

Better Building Beautiful Commission report for a steer on Government priorities and intentions regarding the future of the planning system. Simon expressed support for local design codes, and a wish to see future Local Plans based on civic engagement, with proposals that are consistent with Plans developed in this way being fast tracked through the planning system in future.

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

- Concern that developers will wait to hear what the new system and rules will look like before submitting applications/building homes they have already received permission to build
- Frustration that recommendations from the Letwin Review have not been implemented
- Frustration regarding build out rates
- Frustration that 'Build Better, Build Beautiful' is not compatible with the new permitted development rights given that the first requires standards be adhered to whereas PDR builds are not required to meet design standards of any kind, let alone locally agreed design standards
- Frustration that Government is willing to provide 'certainty' for developers but has not provided certainty to local authorities, local communities or those in need of housing
- Localised and decentralised planning fees should be introduced
- Concern that the planning system is not sufficiently competitive, that the monopoly of big developers has led to land banking and that smaller developers should be encouraged and incentivised in order to break the monopoly and deliver more homes. 'Micro sites' should be allocated in Local and Neighbourhood Plans to provide more diversity of site provision, achieve faster build out rates and produce a more complete market

Decision

This item was for noting.

Action

Officers to invite Simon Gallagher to a future EEHT Board Meeting.

5 Economic Recovery

Eamon Lally, Principal Advisor, introduced the Economic Recovery paper and welcomed comments from Members of the Board.

In the discussion that followed the following points were raised:

- Disagreement with the suggestion of linking economic recovery work to the proposed local government restructure and concern that speculation on this matter by Ministers causes great uncertainty to workforces and makes partnership working more difficult
- Lack of confidence that Business Rates Reform is fit for purpose
- It was acknowledged that the LGA is agnostic on local government structures (and by extension restructures) out of necessity.
- Members welcomed paragraph 15 of the report in particular which made reference to local government's superb delivery of support to businesses during the pandemic, especially grant and loan allocations.
- Members of the board agreed that where there is a shortfall in spend of grants allocated for businesses, the LGA should lobby for the flexibility to use the surplus to support businesses not so far supported by other schemes

Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the update.

6 Housing, Planning, and Homelessness Update Paper

No comments were made.

Decision

The Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board noted the update paper.

7 Note of last meeting

Decision

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
	Cllr David Renard (Chairman)	Swindon Borough Council
	Cllr Christopher Hammond (Acting Vice Chair)	Southampton City Council
	Cllr Adele Morris (Deputy Chair)	Southwark Council
	Cllr Linda Gillham (Deputy Chair)	Runnymede Borough Council
	Cllr Peter Butlin	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Mark Crane	Selby District Council
	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Patrick Nicholson	Plymouth City Council
	Cllr Catherine Rankin	Kent County Council
	Cllr Amanda Serjeant	Chesterfield Borough Council
	Cllr Ed Turner	Oxford City Council
	Cllr Michael Mordey	Sunderland City Council
	Cllr Christopher Hammond	Southampton City Council
	Cllr Tom Hayes	Oxford City Council
	Cllr Peter Mason	Ealing Council
	Cllr Peter Thornton	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr David Beaman	Waverley Borough Council
	Cllr Diana Moore	Exeter City Council
	Cllr Tim Hodgson	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Apologies:	Cllr Darren Rodwell	Barking and Dagenham London Borough Council
	Cllr Nicholas Rushton	Leicestershire County Council
	Mayor Philip Glanville	Hackney London Borough Council
	Cllr Rachel Blake	Tower Hamlets Council