

**From: Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport  
Simon Jones, Corporate Director Growth Environment and Transport**

**To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee**

**Subject: Transport for the South East – KCC endorsement of Transport Strategy for the South East**

**Key decision Decision No: 25/00080**

**Classification: Unrestricted**

**Past Pathway of Paper: N/A**

**Future Pathway of Paper: For Leader decision**

**Electoral Division: All divisions**

**Summary:** Kent County Council (KCC) was a founding member of the Sub-national Transport Body (STB), Transport for the South East (TfSE), participating and funding TfSE since 2017 (decision 16/00120). A further decision (20/00010) was taken in July 2020 to support the TfSE Proposal to Government for Statutory Powers, including endorsing its first Transport Strategy. These decisions were taken by the Leader as they concern participating in a partnership listed in KCC's constitution.

Despite not achieving statutory status, TfSE, like all STBs except Transport for the North (TfN) as the only statutory body, has continued as a voluntary partnership and KCC agreed to this approach with the Leader decision 22/00023 in March 2022. TfSE has continued to receive funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) alongside the annual contributions from its constituent authorities. The Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) was adopted in January 2023 (endorsed in the Leader decision 22/00114). Note that all decisions to date have been by previous Leaders of KCC. The TfSE Board agreed in July 2024 to update its Transport Strategy, which was subject to public consultation from December 2024 to March 2025. KCC, as a member of the Partnership Board, is now being asked to endorse this new Transport Strategy. Therefore, the Leader will need to make the decision on whether or not to do so.

KCC had input to the draft Transport Strategy through KCC's then representative (Former Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, David Robey) sitting on the Transport Strategy Member Task and Finish Group, as well as at officer level through the Transport Strategy Working Group and Senior Officer Group. KCC also responded to the consultation, being broadly positive at the overall ambition and aims of the Strategy and how it accorded with Kent's own recently adopted statutory Local Transport Plan 5. However, the response asked for some changes and also flexibility in the timeline to adoption given the large scale changes across local government in the region.

The final version of the Transport Strategy has been reviewed and is considered to have adequately addressed KCC's consultation response. TfSE's preferred approach

is to proceed with the updated Transport Strategy and address any issues as a result of changes to local government later as a separate workstream.

**Recommendation:**

The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Leader on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (Appendix A):

As Leader of the Council, I agree to:

1. ENDORSE the new Transport Strategy for the South East prepared by Transport for the South East (TfSE) and support TfSE with its implementation; and
2. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to take the actions required to support TfSE with the implementation of the strategy, subject to the Council's decision-making procedures.
3. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) is the largest single constituent member of the Sub-national Transport Body (STB), Transport for the South East (TfSE) and provides an annual contribution of £58,000 towards its operating costs. Match funding is provided by other constituent County Councils and Unitary Authorities, whilst the Department for Transport (DfT) provides the main portion of funding, which in the 2025/26 Financial Year is £2.16m.
- 1.2 The first Key Decision was taken by the then Leader on 8 December 2018 (16/00120) to agree to KCC's participation in TfSE as an informal non-statutory body, and to further work to establish TfSE as a statutory STB. It is therefore listed as a voluntary partnership in KCC's constitution and so decisions pertaining to it are required to be made by the Leader of KCC.
- 1.3 TfSE applied to the Secretary of State for Transport to be granted Statutory Status. KCC's Leader took a further decision (20/00010) on 10 July 2020 to:
  - Consent to Transport for the South East's Proposal to Government for powers in addition to the general powers of a Sub-national Transport Body and endorse the Transport Strategy for the South East as part of this proposal.
  - Participate in, and cooperate with, Transport for the South East in accordance with the powers requested from Government and those powers operating concurrently with Kent County Council as Local Highway Authority and Local Transport Authority.

- 1.4 TfSE was unsuccessful in securing these powers as government did not want to make any other STBs statutory bodies, other than the existing statutory Transport for the North (TfN). TfSE therefore continued as a voluntary partnership and the Leader of KCC took a further decision (22/00023) in March 2022 to agree to this continued partnership working. TfSE has considered making a further bid in due course; however, as part of a review of its function and role no further bid is currently under consideration. Government has continued to provide funding to TfSE, including for the development and adoption of its Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) which required a decision (22/00114) by the Leader of KCC to endorse it in January 2023. Since then, TfSE has used its funding to progress implementation of its SIP and for research on topics ranging from EV charging to decarbonisation, as well as for setting up the Centre of Excellence (a repository of webinars, guidance and other materials for use by constituent members). Note that all decisions to date have been made by previous Leaders of KCC.
- 1.5 Since the adoption of the original Transport Strategy in 2020, much has changed in terms of the context of transport in the South East. There has been a change in national government and consequently national policies, changes to the travel market due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, new trading arrangements post-Brexit, and many of TfSE's constituent members have updated their own Local Transport Plans (including KCC). This has prompted TfSE to refresh its own Transport Strategy. KCC now needs to decide whether to endorse the new Transport Strategy, which will allow KCC's representative on the TfSE Partnership Board (the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) to vote on the new Strategy at the Board meeting on 27 October 2025. The Proposed Record of Decision is **Appendix A** to this report.

## **2. Summary of the new Transport Strategy**

- 2.1 The full draft final Transport Strategy for the South East as presented to the TfSE Partnership Board at its meeting on 21 July 2025 is **Appendix B** to this report. It is summarised as follows.
- 2.2 The Transport Strategy consists of four sections. Firstly, TfSE's role is set out as well as the context for refreshing the Transport Strategy (such as policy and government changes, travel impacts arising from Covid-19, and impacts on trading post-Brexit). It also describes the characteristics of the region and the challenges currently faced (including poor east-west connectivity, stagnating productivity, and a lack of funding for transport interventions).
- 2.3 The next section sets the Vision for the Strategy alongside three goals (economic, social and environmental):

***Our Vision is for the South East to offer the highest quality of life for all and be a global leader in achieving sustainable, net zero carbon growth.***

- 2.4 This then leads to the five Missions that the Strategy prioritises for achievement by 2050, namely:
- **Strategic Connectivity** – to boost connectivity in the South East by enhancing strategic regional corridors to ensure all communities and

businesses have access to high-quality, convenient and resilient transport links and key services, for people and goods.

- **Resilience** – focuses on safeguarding and enhancing the resilience of the South East’s transport network to ensure reliable and smooth journeys for all users.
- **Inclusion and Integration** – to create an inclusive, affordable, and integrated transport network across the South East, providing safe, secure, and seamless door-to-door connectivity for everyone.
- **Decarbonisation** – supporting the South East’s transition to net zero by 2050 by enabling the shift to cleaner transport, promoting sustainable travel choices, and adopting new technologies that reduce emissions and improve quality of life — in a way that is affordable, fair, and accessible to all.
- **Sustainable Growth** – to champion transport interventions that unlock investment, enable sustainable growth, and create healthy, vibrant, well-connected communities in the South East.

2.5 Each of the missions is supported by its desired outcomes, and short- and long-term priorities that will see those outcomes delivered. Those priorities may include some specific schemes, although the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) is the separate document where all proposed project interventions across the region are listed.

2.6 The final section explains the approach to the delivery of the Strategy, including challenges and opportunities that may arise. The emphasis is on the need to work in partnership across the region, not just as TfSE but with other organisations and companies – such as utilities, universities, transport service and infrastructure providers, and government. It includes the specific role TfSE will undertake in relation to each mission. For example, for Strategic Connectivity, TfSE will support the development of business cases for schemes in the SIP, deliver on the recommendations of their studies, work with government and local partners to develop a coherent pipeline of infrastructure investment, and so on.

2.7 The framework for monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy is also included, using measures such as journey time reliability, number of passengers using ‘Smart Ticketing’, and reduced delays on the highways network due to poor weather.

### **3. Transport Strategy consultation and general feedback**

3.1 TfSE consulted on their draft strategy for 12 weeks from December 2024 through to March 2025. Feedback was received from 742 individuals and 69 organisations, with 94% of organisations and 74% of individuals who responded either strongly supporting or supporting the vision and goals in the strategy.

3.2 Amongst organisations, support was especially high. 79% of organisations agreed on the challenges compared with 62% agreeing among those individuals who responded.

- 3.3 All five proposed missions – strategic connectivity; resilience; inclusion and integration; decarbonisation; and sustainable growth – garnered broad support from respondents (84–94% among organisations; 65–84% among individuals).
- 3.4 Additional themes raised during the consultation included health and wellbeing, active travel and connectivity. The full consultation report can be viewed in [Appendix 2 to the TfSE Partnership Board paper](#) from the 21 July 2025 on the progress with the new Transport Strategy (page 6 of the document linked).

#### **4. KCC consultation feedback and how it has been addressed by TfSE**

4.1 The consultation was undertaken prior to the most recent local government elections. An officer response was drafted in line with the recently adopted Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5) after having sought input from officers across Highways and Transportation. An All Member briefing was then held and led by the then-Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Neil Baker. An officer from TfSE presented the Transport Strategy and then KCC officers provided an overview of the proposed consultation response, followed by an opportunity for questions. All comments made by KCC Members were noted and incorporated into a revised response, which was signed off through the officer chain of delegation before being submitted to TfSE in March 2025. KCC’s consultation response is included as **Appendix C** to this report.

4.2 KCC’s consultation response is summarised as follows:

- Asked for greater emphasis on the importance of addressing the growing highways maintenance backlog.
- Considered that many of the contextual issues raised are national issues without specific local resolutions.
- Questioned whether now was the right time for a full refresh of the Transport Strategy given the forthcoming significant challenges of Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and disparity in whether local elections were to be held across the region.

4.3 The response followed the questionnaire format prescribed and so highlighted the most important priority for each of the missions from KCC’s perspective. For example, the restoration of international rail services from both Ebbsfleet and Ashford under the “Strategic Connectivity” mission, and securing sustainable funding for maintenance under “Resilience” were KCC’s top priorities.

4.4 The response also provided some comments on the missions, such as critiquing that the constituent authorities of TfSE do not have sufficient control over all the activities proposed, and that certain priorities should not be a priority for our region – specifically the extension of the Bakerloo Line in south east London as it is not guaranteed to release capacity/train paths to Kent (as it mostly benefits London) and is a considerably expensive scheme outside of the TfSE region.

4.5 Overall, the draft was an ambitious strategy that broadly aligned with Kent’s own LTP, set a bold vision for how the region’s transport networks should function, but was overly reliant on third parties to be successful (such as utilities).

4.6 The changes TfSE have made to the draft as a result of all consultation feedback are:

- References to more recently published policy, such as [UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy](#) and the [Integrated National Transport Strategy](#). Reference has also been made to the mix of authorities on the Devolution Priority Programme across the region and how that will change governance structures.
- Change of emphasis from the economic goal of competing in the global marketplace to building a sustainable, inclusive and resilient economy.
- Other slight changes in emphasis for priorities, such as changing “Expanding rail capacity to support growth at Gatwick and Southampton airports” to “Providing adequate rail capacity and connectivity to support growth...”
- The Decarbonisation mission has been toned down to remove the aspiration to make the South East a global leader and instead support the transition to net zero in a way that is affordable, fair and accessible to all. The outcome is therefore to make progress towards decarbonisation rather than to achieve net zero for surface transport by 2050. This recognises the point KCC made that many of the factors influencing this are outside of TfSE’s direct control.
- Reference to the Bakerloo Line Extension as a priority project has been removed at KCC’s request.
- Recognising the need to make schemes affordable and accessible to all, and reflecting how TfSE can work with partners on capability and capacity building through its Centre of Excellence.

4.7 The changes made have alleviated many of the concerns raised in KCC’s consultation response and now the tone of the Transport Strategy more coherently reflects the range of views across the region. It sets a bold vision for transport across the region and the thematic content is in alignment with the aims of our of [Local Transport Plan 5: Striking the Balance](#).

4.8 The Integrated Sustainability Appraisal has also been updated to reflect the changes since the draft Transport Strategy was assessed. None of the conclusions are affected as a result of the updates and it remains the case that more detailed appraisal will need to take place at the individual project level. The updated Integrated Sustainability Appraisal is available as **Appendix D** to this report.

4.9 The Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) lists specific project interventions that support the delivery of the Transport Strategy. The SIP will be updated in due course and brought forward for a further decision by the Leader of KCC.

## 5. Legal implications

5.1 TfSE will remain a non-statutory, informal and voluntary partnership that KCC participates in. There are no legal implications of the planned decision.

## **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1 KCC contributes £58,000 per year to fund TfSE. All constituent upper tier Local Transport Authorities in the TfSE partnership make this £58,000 a year contribution with Unitary Councils each contributing £30,000. The Department for Transport (DfT) provides the majority of funding support to TfSE, which varies annually but is usually in excess of £1m and most recently to the value of £2.16m within the current Financial Year 2025/26.
- 6.2 There are no additional financial implications to KCC of taking the decision to endorse the new Transport Strategy.

## **7. Equalities implications**

- 7.1 The Transport Strategy is accompanied by an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal, including an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) as shown in Appendix D. None of the outcomes in the strategy were predicted to have a negative effect on any protected characteristic. However, depending on the design of individual project interventions there may be positive and negative impacts. Each will need to undertake their own EqIA in future. **Appendix E** is the EqIA of KCC endorsing TfSE's Transport Strategy.

## **8. Data Protection implications**

- 8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required as this decision does not require the processing of personal data.

## **9. Governance**

- 9.1 The Leader's endorsement of TfSE's Transport Strategy will inform KCC's position at the TfSE Partnership Board. The Board will consider adopting the Strategy at its meeting on 27 October 2025, subject to the endorsement received from constituent authorities, including KCC. The Council's representative on the Board (the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) will participate on the Board, in line with the endorsed position. Any work arising from the TfSE Partnership Board that requires further action or decision by KCC will be subject to the appropriate governance processes and approvals in accordance with the Council's constitution.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 TfSE has updated its Transport Strategy following a public consultation on a new draft strategy. KCC's response to the consultation has been considered by TfSE in finalising the new Transport Strategy, alongside responses from other member authorities, other organisations, and members of the public. A Key Decision is required by the Leader of KCC as it relates to an external partnership listed in KCC's Constitution as to whether KCC endorses the new Transport Strategy.
- 10.2 By endorsing the Transport Strategy, KCC will benefit from being a part of the voice of the wider South East when the new Transport Strategy is presented to

government. Schemes/interventions in the Transport Strategy that are in Kent will therefore have increased visibility with the Department for Transport.

## 11. Recommendation

- 11.1 The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Leader on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (Appendix A) to:

As Leader of the Council, I agree to:

1. ENDORSE the new Transport Strategy for the South East prepared by Transport for the South East (TfSE) and support TfSE with its implementation; and
2. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to take the actions required to support TfSE with the implementation of the strategy, subject to the Council's decision-making procedures.
3. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.

## 12. Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Proposed Record of Decision
- Appendix B: TfSE's Final Transport Strategy
- Appendix C: [KCC response to TfSE Draft Transport Strategy](#)
- Appendix D: [TfSE Final Integrated Sustainability Appraisal](#):
- Appendix E: EqIA for KCC endorsing TfSE's Transport Strategy

## 13. Contact Details

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