

Taunton Deane Borough Council response for Lyons Enquiry on Eddington, Barket and Leitch reviews (Jan 2007)

Eddington Transport Study

Governance

- Can local authorities work effectively in partnership to deliver transport outcomes or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

Effective partnership is possible and we have worked together very successfully with the County Council to introduce Park and Ride Schemes, transport infrastructure essential for economic regeneration, agreeing strategies for parking charges and on-street parking and concessionary travel. We have also successfully balloted together for national funding to improve connectivity to the region.

- What are the key behaviours required of local authorities to work in such partnerships? Would new institutional or contractual arrangements be needed to support them?

We have a Joint Vision for economic regeneration (Project Taunton) for the area which has been the corner-stone to successful partnership work on Transport solutions. It is clear that a joint vision and agreed priorities are advantageous to working together.

- Do the issues not considered by Eddington – particularly the potential benefits of aligning transport with other policy powers – alter the best overall design for governance arrangements?

It would be beneficial for the 'place-shaping' agenda if transport organizations (or any newly created institutions) were included as a partner with a duty to co-operate to achieve LAA targets

- How could local government make use of any new bus powers in line with its broader role in promoting economic development?

The "Putting Passengers First" document sets out the government's proposals for future bus policy. Stronger partnership between local authorities and bus operators should allow more say in ensuring bus routes support economic regeneration including tackling deprivation.

Convening

- How can local authorities make the links between transport and other elements of economic development and quality of life most effectively at the local level?

The Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA distils local priorities and targets. The proposed new fourth block 'Economic Development and the Environment' (Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper) will provide the focus and the means to achieve the best and most co-ordinated approach to delivery.

Funding

- How could current funding arrangements best be reformed to support cost effective and appropriate spending and investment decisions at sub-national level?

We would hope to secure a proportion of revenues gained from any road tolling along the M5, A303 and A30 to reinvest in alternative transport solutions for Somerset.

- What transport funding sources are most appropriately managed by local bodies? What would be the most appropriate incentives to encourage the adoption of demand management options at a local level?
- Local authorities currently retain the revenues from local road pricing schemes. How might further developments in this area affect the use of those revenues?

Other Comments

We have some concern that rural areas such as Taunton and Somerset will not meet the criteria for the three strategic economic priorities for transport policy for the next 20 years.

Taunton is defined in the RSS as a SSCT Strategically Significant City / Town and we would expect it to be the recipient of some funding, so there would need to be a clear definition of what the three strategic economic priorities will include.

The regeneration projects we are delivering (such as Project Taunton) will be critical for the future economic prosperity of our region and will require investment in transport infrastructure to be successful

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

Governance

- What specific measures are needed to ensure that local planning authorities have appropriate flexibility over issues of solely local impact? Are there particular implications from the Review's recommendations on the use of green belt land?

There needs to be better support and advice from Government Office and the Planning Inspectorate to streamline the development of the LDF so that it can be delivered more quickly, ensuring we have appropriate up-to-date policies for the area in place.

Taunton Deane does not have Green Belt Land

- What different approaches could be taken to enable strategic decisions to be taken at an appropriate spatial level? Can local authorities work effectively in partnership across wider areas to do this or are new/reformed institutions necessary?

Locally, Taunton, Wellington and Bridgwater is classified as one planning area in our RSS. The Regional Assembly takes a lead, bringing in the County Council and the two district councils to work in partnership across this area, and this is working very well

- What role should local authorities have in relation to a future independent Planning Commission, and how should they best work with local communities on their concerns and potential benefits?

The Local Authority will need to ensure that community concerns are fed through to the Planning Commission, after appropriate community consultation. The LA will also be in a position to provide technical advice and local knowledge.

Convening

- How can local authorities link work on planning, housing and transport issues together most effectively?

Locally the Somerset Strategic Planning conference has officer meetings six-weekly, and councillor meetings quarterly. The County and the Districts meet to discuss the RSS, LTP and LDF and all issues are raised and considered. This addresses and links work on planning, housing and transport issues effectively.

Funding

- What would be the most effective and practical means of creating incentives for local authorities to support appropriate growth?

By directing more funding for infrastructure development to support higher growth targets. Perhaps having a pot of funding that local authorities can bid for, demonstrating the benefits to the local economy, local community etc. Infrastructure funding for transport, flooding etc is critical before growth can be realized in an area.

- How should the empty property relief in business rates be reformed? How should a charge on vacant and derelict brownfield land be introduced into the existing local land and property tax system? Would any local flexibility on such measures be desirable?

Leitch Review of Skills

Governance

- With their new strategic leadership role, how can local authorities relate most effectively to a reformed Learning and Skills Council on 14-19 education issues? What are the merits of the different options for managing the division of these responsibilities?

We have a multi-partnership agreement that includes the LSC and local authorities to deliver the Somerset Children and Young People's Plan (to deliver the 'Children and Young People' block of the LAA). This document crystallizes our joint targets.

Convening

- What links need to be made between employment and skills provision, and other local services and responsibilities?

There needs to be a real link between Economic Development sections of local councils, Local Education authorities, the LSC, local education providers, Forward Planning units and Regional Development Agencies, as well as other agencies (CAB, JobCentrePlus etc.)

For Project Taunton, our 20 year regeneration plan, our challenge is to attract the best mix of businesses for the local economy and ensure that we will have and grow the skill base locally to meet these businesses needs. We need to address the deficit of graduates leaving the area by attracting employers of graduate level jobs.

We plan to actively engage the deprived communities to involve them and alert them of training and job opportunities both in the development phase (construction etc) and the implementation phase.

We also have a role supporting employers and training providers (and our own staff) to ensure adult literacy and numeracy is addressed (to meet national skills for life targets)

- What role should local authorities play in a new demand-led skills system?
- What role should local authorities play in the proposed Employment and Skills Boards, to ensure skills and employment issues are properly linked to wider work on economic prosperity and development?

Local Authorities should feed in the hard economic facts for the locality, liaising with employers to help voice their skills needs and ensure provision is available to meet these needs.

Local Authorities have their finger on the pulse of the local economy, growth areas, gaps and local issues (e.g. Taunton Deane has a rural economy with

many farmers diversifying). These are defined in their Economic Development Strategies. We engage with businesses through business support and advice, promoting tourism, specific services (e.g. Food licensing) and we also hold data on businesses through the NDR charges.

Funding

- What implications for local authority funding do the Leitch recommendations or related proposals have?