

Report on Westminster Energy, Environment & Transport Forum

10th July 2019 London

‘City region transport and regional connectivity- funding, collaboration and project delivery’

1. This conference looked at the problems faced by the poor state of transport infrastructure in the UK with special reference to the role of city regions. Reference was made in particular to the National Infrastructure Assessment drawn up by the National Infrastructure Commission, as well as the Transforming Cities Fund which can be used to improve transport infrastructure.
2. Sadie Morgan, from the National Infrastructure Commission, pointed out that cities in the UK lagged behind their European counterparts in respect of productivity and this was related to the poor state of their transport infrastructure. This link between transport infrastructure and productivity was made by a number of other speakers including Phillip Beer, a partner in the Transport law firm Burges Salmon, who said that increased connectivity was directly related to higher GDP per capita.
3. It was estimated that up to £43bn was required to improve transport infrastructure in the UK by 2040 and the key need was for stable funding. The UK is presently investing £1.7bn to improve the transport infrastructure in the city regions of which £75million has gone to the Tees Valley Combined Authority
4. Phillip Beer said that it was necessary to develop infrastructure projects with care, fully involving local residents. The mantra he used was: articulate the vision, identify the benefits, consult widely and future proof the development. It was essential to have a local plan as well as a joint local transport plan before starting. Consultation with neighbouring authorities was also very important. The alternative scenario could be summed up as decide, announce, defend withdraw! The views of Phillip Beer were supported by David Carter from the West of England Combined Authority who stressed the need to have the above plans in advance. He also stressed that it was essential to be prepared to change the programme over time, and to consider incremental change rather than seeking to alter everything at once.

5. There were a number of speakers from various local authorities and transport authorities including Portsmouth, the West Midlands and the West of England. The key issues they stressed were as follows;
 - a. Work in cooperation with private transport providers, preferably getting them to operate as one body
 - b. Develop transport interchanges to link different modes of transport
 - c. Develop specific transport corridors giving priority to public transport
 - d. Ensure that ticketing was integrated with clear pricing information
 - e. Provide adequate information about transport options at all transport hubs
 - f. Ensure public transport is reliable, practicable and value for money
6. David Widger, the Regional Director of the transport consultants AECOM, referred to the significant economic effect of improving transport connectivity. In particular he looked at the example of the Dockland Light Railway in rejuvenating the docklands area, as well as the recent extension to the Jubilee Line which had made a significant economic impact in east London. He said that there was a key business agglomeration effect where new businesses would cluster around key transport nodes. The need to consult with one party to negotiate on behalf of all private sector transport providers was also important.
7. Apart from the above issues, the conference looked at a number of other matters. In particular the growth of powered light vehicles including electric bikes, and how that can be incorporated into the present traffic management systems as well as the benefits of improving active transport links such as cycling and footpaths. The problems of concentrating too much on investing in car transport meant that cycling still remained very low at 2% of commuting journeys and bus passenger numbers had fallen last year by another 2%.
8. This was a very stimulating conference with some very useful ideas. These need to be taken into consideration when looking at infrastructure development.

David J Branson 11.7.19