

National Infrastructure Commission

RTPI Evidence on Transport in London

8 January 2016

Introduction

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has over 23,000 members who work in the public, private, voluntary and education sectors. It is a charity whose purpose is to develop the art and science of town planning for the benefit of the public. The RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, practice advice, training and development.

Consultation Questions and Answers

1. What are the major economic and social challenges facing London and its commuter hinterland over the next two to three decades?

Governance

A key challenge is how London and the rest of the South East are governed together in a joined-up manner. It can be helpful to consider the rest of the South East in two zones. The South East Study 1964 identified the **Outer Metropolitan Area (OMA)** (roughly equivalent to the Metropolitan Green Belt plus the (substantial) towns within it, and the **Outer South East (OSE)**. These definitions seem to hold today, and certainly avoid the political and public relations difficulty of referring to the “commuter hinterland” of London (which in any case is a partly misleading term as there are many jobs in the OMA itself). The key questions around transport infrastructure probably apply to the OMA.

Various attempts have been made to address the governance question and none have been totally satisfactory. It is interesting that in northern cities the Government has insisted on joint working across a travel to work area, but due to the existing Mayoral arrangements for London inside the M25, there has been no similar requirement of London.

The creation of the Mayoralty led in the first two terms to a fairly limited discourse between the Mayor and the counties round about. Under the Labour government three different regional plans were pursued for the London and OMA. The debates around the latest

alteration to the London Plan have begun to cause a more extensive debate, but still one very much choreographed by the Greater London Authority, rather than on a broader and more neutral platform.

The RTPI has argued for both much stronger but voluntary cooperation on strategic planning between the planning authorities *within* the counties of the OMA but also for cooperation between neighbouring strategic planning areas. In this context this would be between the GLA and the surrounding counties. In our view these must take place within a context of incentives. This can operate such that counties are incentivised to take additional housing in return for public spending on issues which are important to them, such as schools, health care facilities and transport investment. Imposing London overspill on surrounding areas has not in the past proved successful and is politically unwise.

Fragmentation of decision making

Fragmentation is not only a challenge across the geography of the London region, but especially seriously across sectors. One difficulty with the proper planning of housing and transport in the wider London region has been the disconnection between decisions on fares, decisions on train operation and decisions on land use. An example is the situation at Ashford where the international operation of the station has been reduced despite its significance as a growth point.

Social balance

Various factors are putting the continued social balance of London seriously at risk. These are high prices for private homes, high private sector rents, very low levels of social housing construction, loss of high value council houses (proposed), bedroom tax, and estate “regeneration” (where leaseholders in particular run the risk of not being able to buy back into their estate).

As a solution to housing shortage some commentators have proposed that homes should be built in the OMA and/or in the part of the Metropolitan Green Belt within the M25. This would only be of value to low income Londoners priced out of inner London if both fast times, sufficient capacity and, critically, *affordable fares* are guaranteed. Conventionally, the stock broker belt is so called for a reason : only higher paid staff could afford the travel and had the option of sociable working hours. Far flung destinations are only conceivable solutions for low income housing if travel is timely and above all cheap.

Air quality and Carbon reduction

London’s air pollution is breaching European safety limits and road traffic levels remain too high. The next Mayor should take a proactive approach to tackling this problem, which recognises the potential to achieve major public health and productivity gains through low-carbon transport measures. These should include advancing the implementation of the Ultra Low Emissions Zone and extending the Congestion Charging Zones to restrict the number of polluting vehicles on the roads, complemented with a new fleet of electric buses and taxis, a

city-wide network of electric vehicle charging stations, and by doubling the number of safe, integrated cycle routes by 2030.

2. What are the strategic options for future investment in large-scale transport infrastructure improvements in London - on road, rail and underground - including, but not limited to, Crossrail 2?

The choice of locations for large scale infrastructure should be informed by where it can unlock substantial housing investment. This would include the Barking Riverside area where commitments have been made.

3. What opportunities are there to increase the benefits and reduce the costs of the proposed Crossrail 2 scheme?

We would repeat our comments above that it is essential to relate the scheme as closely as possible to additional housing development. Crossrail 1 and the northern line extension have been funded on the principle that its only business landowners who should pay for infrastructure through higher tax revenues. While the principle of taxing increased land values is sensible, It is our view that the owners of land for business and the owners of housing land should both be liable for tax contributions to cross rail 2.

However, a balance must be struck from using the enabling development solely to raise as much money as possible, and other priorities from the use of land, such as meeting London's housing need in the round – and also *the housing needs* . Too often using public land for the narrowly profitable purposes

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